

1997

# The Myth of Narcissus and the Narcissistic Structure.

Joachim Conrad hermann Vogeler

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses)

---

## Recommended Citation

Vogeler, Joachim Conrad hermann, "The Myth of Narcissus and the Narcissistic Structure." (1997). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 6603.

[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool\\_disstheses/6603](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6603)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [gradetd@lsu.edu](mailto:gradetd@lsu.edu).

## INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

**The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.** Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

# UMI

A Bell & Howell Information Company  
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA  
313/761-4700 800/521-0600



THE MYTH OF NARCISSUS AND THE NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Interdepartmental Program in Comparative Literature

by  
Joachim C. H. Vogeler  
M.A.T., Freie Universität Berlin, 1993  
December 1997



**UMI Number: 9820757**

**Copyright 1997 by  
Vogeler, Joachim Conrad Hermann**

**All rights reserved.**

---

**UMI Microform 9820757  
Copyright 1998, by UMI Company. All rights reserved.**

**This microform edition is protected against unauthorized  
copying under Title 17, United States Code.**

---

**UMI**  
**300 North Zeeb Road**  
**Ann Arbor, MI 48103**

© Copyright 1997  
Joachim Conrad Hermann Vogeler  
All rights reserved

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The story of Narcissus has captured my full interest since December 1991 when my friend Holger Kaltoven invited me to explore a psychological interpretation of the ancient myth. I was very pleased when Professor Robert J. Edgeworth at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge offered me the opportunity to pursue my interest. I thank him first of all for all his encouragement and help in overseeing the writing of my dissertation.

Over the past four years, many others have also supported me in various ways: first, of course, my parents Dipl.-Ing. Jürgen and Gisela Vogeler deserve to be mentioned first for their reliable assistance.

Special thanks must also go to Dr. Dr. Wilfried Wieck and the participants of his summer 1995 retreat, who provided me with a forum for discussing my proposal.

For her sound editorial advice, I wish to thank Mimi Bhattacharyya, M.A., first of all. I would also like to thank my colleagues Dr. Daniel Carpenter, Barbara Craig, M.A., and my friend Monika Olivier for critical readings of my work.

Professor Alexandre Leupin, and my other committee members, Professors Emily Batinski, Ruth Bowman, John Pizer, and Gregory Stone have provided many valuable suggestions for improving the manuscript.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends Dr. Markus Pennekamp, Dipl.-Ing. Martin Hecker, and Robert Gottschalk for their interest in and support of my endeavor.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS . . . . .	iii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS . . . . .	vi
ABSTRACT . . . . .	viii
I. INTRODUCTION: THE CULTURE OF INCEST PROHIBITION . .	1
The Culture of Narcissism . . . . .	1
The Research Situation . . . . .	2
Purpose, Thesis, and Method of this Study . . . . .	6
II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO MYTH . . . . .	13
Interpretations of Myth . . . . .	13
Literature and Psychoanalysis . . . . .	20
Narcissus and Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism . . . . .	26
Definitions of Narcissism . . . . .	33
Ego and Self Psychology . . . . .	51
Jacques Lacan . . . . .	57
III. THE NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE	82
The Narcissus Theme in Classical Literature . . . . .	82
The Myth of Narcissus prior to Ovid . . . . .	83
Ovid's Version of the Myth of Narcissus . . . . .	95
The Psychoanalytic Implications of the Myth . . . . .	105
A Kohutian Reading of Ovid's Text . . . . .	106
A Lacanian Reading of Ovid's Text . . . . .	115
IV. CAPTAIN AHAB'S NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S <i>MOBY-DICK</i> . . . . .	132
V. GUSTAV VON ASCHENBACH'S NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN THOMAS MANN'S <i>DER TOD IN Venedig</i> . . . . .	165
VI. CONCLUSION: THE NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE . . . . .	212
REFERENCES . . . . .	216
VITA . . . . .	225

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- E** Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits*. A Selection. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton: 1977. Originally published as *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).
- Death in Venice* Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. Translated by David Luke. London: Secker and Warburg, 1990.
- GW** Freud, Sigmund. *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch geordnet*. 18 vols. 1940-1968. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1973-1978.
- Hill** Ovid. *Metamorphoses* 1-4. Edited and translated by D. H. Hill. Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris & Phillips, 1985.
- Jones** Pliny. *Natural History*. Translated by H. Rackham. 10 vols. Vols. 6-8 translated by W. H. S. Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938-1965.
- Mann, GW** Mann, Thomas. *Gesammelte Werke*. 12 vols. [Frankfurt/Main]: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960.
- Moby-Dick* Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick: or The Whale*. Edited by Harrison Hayford et al. Vol. 6 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- OLD** *Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Edited by P. G. W. Glare. 1968. Reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Ov. Met.** Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Edited by William S. Anderson. 4th ed. 1977. Reprint, Leipzig: Teubner, 1988.
- Plin. Nat. Hist.** Pliny. *C. Plinius Secundus Naturalis Historia*. Edited by L. Ian and C. Mayhoff. 7 vols. 1892. Reprint, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967.
- RE** *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. 24 vols. Edited by Georg Wissowa et al. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894-1963.
- Roscher** *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Edited by Wilhelm H.

Roscher. 7 vols. 1884-1937. 2nd reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1977-1978.

- S 1 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book 1. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954.* Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by John Forrester and Sylvana Tomaselli. 1988. Reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991. Originally published as *Le Séminaire I* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).
- S 2 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book 2. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955.* Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by John Forrester and Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988. Originally published as *Le Séminaire II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978).
- S 7 Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960.* Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton: 1992. Originally published as *Le Séminaire VII* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986).
- SE Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works.* Translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953-1974.

## **ABSTRACT**

Since Freud's article "On Narcissism," behavioral psychologists have predominantly viewed this phenomenon as a personality disorder. This dissertation, in contrast, provides a psychoanalytic, i.e., Lacanian reading of the myth of Narcissus as it is recorded in classical literature, and brings about an understanding of the myth's underlying structure.

The four fundamental exigencies of the myth's structure include the incest prohibition which symbolically castrates the human subject, the incestuous desire as a result of this prohibition, the displacement of this desire for another imaginary object, and the obsessive quest of that image as the symptom. This structure--defined as narcissistic structure and encountered in the behavior of human beings--manifests itself in all kinds of literary texts from various national literatures, genres, and epochs as a literary theme, the Narcissus theme. Yet this narcissistic configuration prevails as a structural fact beyond the study of specific influence of the Narcissus myth. An examination of texts in which the myth of Narcissus is neither an explicit nor an implicit theme also often reveals the structure of this myth.

In conclusion, I suggest that an understanding of the frustrating mechanisms of the narcissistic structure may



allow us to escape the violent and suicidal aspects of this configuration.

## I. INTRODUCTION: THE CULTURE OF INCEST PROHIBITION THE CULTURE OF NARCISSISM

Narcissism, by reference to the myth of Narcissus, is defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as "love directed towards the image of oneself."<sup>1</sup> A narcissist in the narrow sense, then, is someone who loves an image of himself or herself more than anybody else. Narcissism in the broad sense can be the identification with any image. The narcissistic identification always entails an obsessive quality. As a phenomenon, narcissism has gained tremendous popularity in the twentieth century. Ever since Sigmund Freud's groundbreaking 1914 essay "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus [On Narcissism]," literally hundreds of publications in the fields of psychology, social sciences, philosophy, and literature have appeared, especially over the past 30 years, documenting the relevance and importance of narcissism in our society.<sup>2</sup>

Next to the Oedipus complex, narcissism is one of the most important concepts in psychoanalytic theory. In *Meaning and Being in Myth*, Norman Austin claims that "[t]he

---

<sup>1</sup> Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis, *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: W. W. Norton, 1973), 255; originally published as *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* ([Paris]: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> In psychology, for example, see the works of Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg; in the social sciences the work of Christopher Lasch; and in literature the works of Louise M. Vinge and Lynne Layton.

myth of Narcissus is the central myth in human thought, though the fate of Narcissus, to drown in his own reflections, is not the only solution."<sup>3</sup> Austin continues to say that Freud gave such prominence to the myth of Oedipus that it seemed to be the dominant myth of our time.

Narcissism, however, has existed long before Freud, as has the prohibition of incest as a basic, universal law. This work has been written under the assumption that Lacan's presuppositions about the universality of the incest prohibition are valid; the terms "incest prohibition" and "incestuous desire" have to be understood in a metaphorical rather than in a literal way. Incestuous desire thus refers to people's tendency to strive for completeness rather than to sleep with the parent of the opposite sex. Due to the incest prohibition, the human effort for completeness is bound to fail, thus leading to narcissistic identification in an act of displacement. In other words, the culture of narcissism grows out of the culture of the incest prohibition--or culture per se.

#### **THE RESEARCH SITUATION**

Theoretical interest in the psyche's narcissistic desire and its concomitant implications may have begun as early as the Romantic era with its obsession with the self

---

<sup>3</sup> Norman Austin, *Meaning and Being in Myth* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990), 3.

and its subjective construction of reality, according to Jeffrey Adams and Eric Williams.<sup>4</sup> While German Romantics such as Fichte may have speculated on the psychological identity of self and world, the phenomenon which has engendered so much speculation seems to be much older. After all, the issue of self and world, or "other" in Lacanian terminology, leads us straight back to the ancient myth which provides a point of origination for the term "narcissism," i.e., the story of Narcissus. Humanity remains in search of the self and one's identity; in particular, it seems that the present generation is absorbed by a "culture of narcissism," as Christopher Lasch argues in his popular book.<sup>5</sup>

In the field of psychology, members of the American Psychiatric Association have classified narcissism under the entry "narcissistic personality disorder." At this point, I should make it clear that I do distinguish between psychology and psychoanalysis as two fundamentally different approaches to the human psyche. Freud's psychoanalytic method, stripped of its biologisms by Jacques Lacan, provides a more salient means of analyzing narcissism as

---

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Adams and Eric Williams, eds., *Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in German Literature from Romanticism to Post Modernism* (Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995), 1.

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism* (1979; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991), 5.

permanent structural fact in human beings as well as in literary works than Kohut's method of psychological introspection.

Even though the myth of Narcissus is over two thousand years old, scholars did not begin to explore its psychoanalytic implications until the early twentieth century. Very few scholars, mostly analysts, have addressed the intriguing question how and why people develop a narcissistic personality structure.<sup>6</sup> A discussion of the story of Narcissus, however, will reveal that the narcissistic structure remains disguised in the ancient myth and other literary works.

In the field of literary studies, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early Nineteenth Century*--but not in the post-Freudian era--has been documented by literary historian Louise Vinge.<sup>7</sup> Her 1967 study is valuable as a source book, but her approach merely records the reception of a literary theme in later times and

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Klaus Schlagmann, *Die Wahrheit über Narziß, Iokaste, Ödipus und Norbert Hanold: Versuch einer konstruktiven Streitschrift* (Saarbrücken: Verlag Der Stammbaum und die Sieben Zweige/Klaus Schlagmann, 1996), 39: "Leidende Menschen werden anhand scheinbarer Fehler beschrieben. Es wird so gut wie überhaupt nicht der Entstehung dieser Symptomatik nachgespürt! [People who are suffering are described according to their seeming faults. However, the cause of these symptoms is hardly studied!]."

<sup>7</sup> Louise M. Vinge, *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*, trans. Robert Dewsnap (Lund: Gleerups, 1967).

does not go beyond the realm of influence study, thus only yielding limited insight. By 1986, as the publication of the first anthology of critical essays on narcissism<sup>8</sup> indicated, the research situation on narcissism in literature was shifting and beginning to characterize the myth of Narcissus as a central myth of human thought, which is currently reflected in the rising number of publications. Layton and Schapiro's 1986 anthology, *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self*, marks a flawed attempt to "apply" Heinz Kohut's findings about narcissism in the realm of behaviorist psychology to literature. In this anthology, many contributors have attempted to force Kohut's findings upon literary texts.

From a psychoanalytic point of view, the universal incest prohibition poses the basis of the narcissistic structure. The mechanisms of the incest prohibition have been ably commented upon by Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Structural Anthropology*,<sup>9</sup> even though Lévi-Strauss had no interest in psychoanalysis. With the translation of Jacques Lacan's work into English, the Saussurean structural approach to psychoanalysis appears slowly to have found its

---

<sup>8</sup> Lynne Layton and Barbara Ann Schapiro, eds., *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self* (New York: New York University Press, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*. 2 vols., trans. Monique Layton (New York: Basic Books, 1976), 2: 19-24.

way into Anglo-American academic circles that have been influenced strongly by behaviorist theories. Lacan's post-structuralist works, which build on the works of Freud and de Saussure, form the basis for my analysis of the narcissistic structure in a few exemplary texts.

#### **PURPOSE, THESIS, AND METHOD OF THIS STUDY**

Lacan's research on narcissism offers a revolutionary approach to apparently invariable structures of a world that continues to display an abundance of violence and deadly narcissistic behavior. At a time when literary studies have become more global than ever before, narcissism serves as a perfect example of the exigency of crossing the boundaries between academic disciplines, and of integrating the various theoretical positions of German, French, English, and American thinkers in order to come to terms with a central myth in human thought. In this study, I will argue for the necessity of a comparative approach which will explore the narcissistic configuration more fully. A comparative and interdisciplinary approach is the best way to gain insight into a complex phenomenon that has intrigued scholars in various disciplines long before Freud wrote his introduction "On Narcissism" in 1914.

The central purpose of this study then is to analyze the narcissistic structure of the human subject as found in literature. Assuming the universality of the incest taboo, I argue that the narcissistic configuration, encountered in

the behavior of human beings, manifests itself in all kinds of literary texts. My thesis does not suggest that this structure appears in every literary text or that every literary figure would display narcissistic tendencies, but rather that the narcissistic structure potentially coincides with the delineation of literary figures in any kinds of texts. The relationship between incest prohibition, which accounts for the incestuous desire in the realm of the unconscious, and narcissistic identification is characterized by the displacement of incestuous desire for narcissistic identification in the realm of the imaginary. In other words, because people cannot fulfill their incestuous desire, they identify with a substitute object, which can be either their own image (Narcissus) or another object (Moby Dick, Tazio). The narcissistic structure of the human subject must be viewed as the result of a family arrangement primarily based on incest prohibition. Specific family structures, e.g., an emotionally unbalanced mother and an absent father, may intensify the degree to which the human subject suffers from the universal narcissistic structure.

While for the most part the conceptualization of narcissism has happened in the field of psychology, neither this discipline nor the study of the myth itself in the field of classics has provided a critical discourse which would explain the narcissistic structure in literary texts



of any national literature and in all genres. Approaches to literature, however, have evolved dramatically since the changes psychoanalysis has enacted upon literary theory. With the advent of psychoanalysis, non-fictional explanations of material formerly considered purely fictional were sought--and texts from all genres have been interpreted from a psychoanalytic point of view.<sup>10</sup>

One psychoanalytic approach to literature--postulated by Ludwig Pfandl as early as 1935--understands myth as a projection of the unconscious psychic struggles which one pretends not to know but which influence one's behavior. Myth, then, is a way of interpreting and coping with what humanity has not yet understood intellectually.<sup>11</sup> According to Pfandl, a neurosis is the primary element of the concept of narcissism--and not the myth:

Das Primäre im Narzißbegriff ist nicht der Mythos, sondern die Neurose. Zuerst war der Mensch da und mit ihm seine Erlebnisse, Zweifel, Kämpfe und Leiden; dann erst kamen die Versuche, diesen Dingen befreienden Ausdruck zu geben, sie durch Projektion in die Wirklichkeit ihrer Geheimnisse und damit ihrer

---

<sup>10</sup> See Maud Ellmann, ed., *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism* (London: Longman, 1994), who has compiled psychoanalytic interpretations on drama, narrative, and poetry.

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Pfandl, "Der Narzißbegriff--Versuch einer neuen Deutung," *Imago* 21 (1935): 290; "Mythos und Märchen, Traum und Neurose arbeiten als Emanationen des Unbewußten mit den gleichen psychischen Mechanismen [Myth and fairy-tale, dream and neurosis, all work with the same mechanisms as emanations of the unconscious]" (p. 298).

Schrecken zu entkleiden; dann erst entstand, mit anderen Worten gesagt, der Mythos.<sup>12</sup>

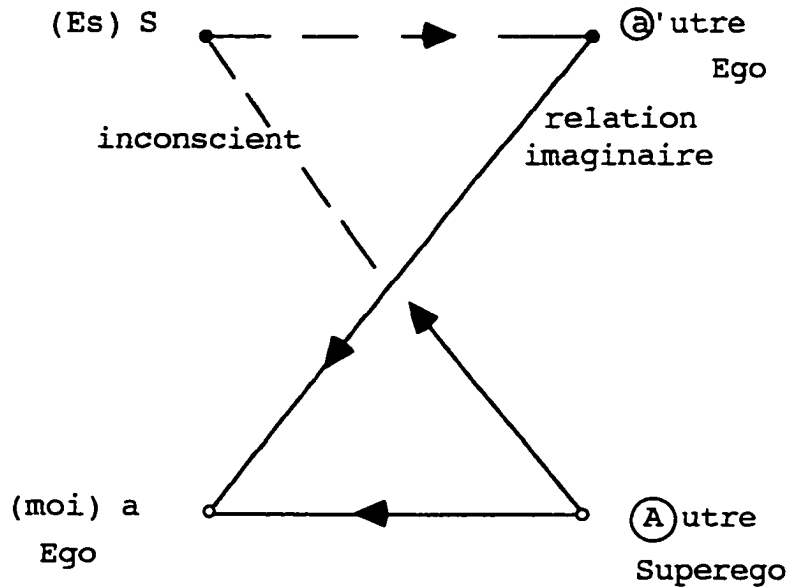
The primary element of the concept of narcissism is not the myth but the neurosis. For there was man and his experiences, doubts, struggles, and sufferings; then attempts were made to express these things in a liberating way, to strip them of their mystery and horrors by projecting them into reality; then, in other words, myth emerged.

A presentation of different theoretical positions presented in chapter two will show that it is impossible, and not even desirable, to arrive at a unified psychological perspective. Although attempts to integrate or synthesize psychological and psychoanalytic theories fail, Freud's classic psychoanalytic theory can be reconciled with a structural, Lacanian approach. After a critical examination of various theories on narcissism in chapter two, Lacan's Schéma L emerges as the theoretical paradigm which, I contend, conceptualizes the narcissistic structure of the human subject best. Lacan renamed Freud's three fundamental exigencies (Es, Ego, and Superego) as Real, Imaginary, and Symbolic and mapped the relationship of these categories in his Schéma L:<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Pfandl, 281.

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book 2. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (1988; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991) (hereafter abbreviated as *S*), 2: 109; originally published as *Le Séminaire II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978).



This 1955 schema, which exemplifies universal castration in the field of the Symbolic, incestuous desire in the field of the Real, and imaginary or narcissistic identification in the field of the Imaginary, will be examined closely before selected literary texts are analyzed in respect to their psychoanalytic implications.

The task is to illuminate and explore fully the myth of Narcissus from a different angle, namely, to adopt a psychoanalytic method and read myth as a literary case. The standard text, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, has been ably commented upon by Franz Bömer<sup>14</sup> in the field of Classics but less

---

<sup>14</sup> Franz Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso. Metamorphosen: Kommentar*, 7 vols. (Heidelberg: Winter, 1969-1986).

research has been done to analyze the psychoanalytic implications of Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus.

A psychoanalytic reading of Ovid's text as a literary case in chapter three allows us to look beyond the manifest contents at the latent contents, and to define clearly the dependence--or, for that matter, independence--of the narcissistic structure in relation to the myth of Narcissus as it is recorded in classical literature. A psychoanalytic reading, based on the findings of Freud and Lacan, will demonstrate the universal aspects of this myth, i.e., castration, desire, and identification--including the suicidal tendencies of the narcissistically structured human being. Furthermore, such a reading of the myth of Narcissus will create both a fuller understanding of Ovid's text and of other, modern literary texts.

My contribution to scholarship is to make obvious the link between the findings of modern psychoanalytic concepts and the myth of Narcissus as it is recorded in classical literature; more precisely, to demonstrate that it enables us to take texts as literary cases and show how they coincide with the psychic structures of human beings. In chapters four and five, this study takes the narcissistic structure--as analyzed in the myth of Narcissus in chapter three--as its reference point for further interpretation. I will offer a comparative analysis of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* [*Death in Venice*]

as examples of two modern literary texts in English and German literature where the myth of Narcissus is neither an explicit nor an implied theme. By examining castration, desire, and obsession with one's narcissistic identification as the common points in *Moby-Dick* and *Death in Venice*, I will show that, beyond the realm of influence study, Captain Ahab's and Gustav von Aschenbach's narcissistic structure prevails as a configuration which suggests its validity for interpretation of a broad range of literary texts.

## II. THEORETICAL APPROACHES TO MYTH

### INTERPRETATIONS OF MYTH

Over the centuries, attempts to interpret myths have led to the creation of a large number of theories explaining literary representations of ancient myths. "Myth," from the Greek word  $\mu\tilde{\upsilon}\theta\omicron\varsigma$ , refers in its most basic meaning simply to a story. A myth, such as the myth of Narcissus, has been transmitted from generation to generation as a story which, at some point, experienced some alterations. The myth of Narcissus certainly circulated in different versions before Ovid shaped it in his way. Some of the earlier versions of the myth seem to be irrevocably lost but the multitude of sources also accounts for the variety in interpretations.

Many approaches to myth have proven to be somewhat faulty or reductionary in nature because they attempt to read things into the myth which are not in the text. For instance, theories reducing myth to a number of ready-made symbols or explanations of nature, as advocated by Johann Mannhardt (1831-1880) and Sir James Frazer (1854-1941), only search for a meaning of myth outside its narrative structure. Similarly, a reduction of myth to explain only history, as proposed by Karl Otfried Müller, is still common.<sup>1</sup> My analysis of the myth of Narcissus centers on

---

<sup>1</sup> For a thorough but comprehensive introduction to the major approaches to myth see Fritz Graf, *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*, trans. Thomas Marier (1993; reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press,

the literary version, as it is recorded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Ovid's version stands by itself, as any other version of the myth, and can be analyzed both in terms of its position in the literary tradition of the myth of Narcissus and, independently, as one of the many myths within the *Metamorphoses*. My approach to myth is of a psychoanalytic nature, thus treating Ovid's text as a literary case which becomes symptomatic at certain points.

In the twentieth century, scholars interpreting myths have often focused on the narrative structure of myths. According to Fritz Graf, three schools of thought have dominated the field recently: the students of Sigmund Freud and psychoanalysis, the Cambridge school of myth and ritual, and structuralists such as Claude Lévi-Strauss.<sup>2</sup>

For the French ethnologist Lévi-Strauss (\*1908), myths are a medium for communication. The meaning of a myth stems from its structure, arising from a complex system of binary oppositions, inversions, and parallelisms that create meaning in human life. Lévi-Strauss' approach is very much influenced by the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure about the structure of language. Lévi-Strauss' contribution to the study of mythology is the recognition

---

1996), 29-31; originally published as *Griechische Mythologie. Eine Einführung* (Munich: Artemis, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> For a brief survey of these three schools of thought see Graf, 35-56.

that myths are significantly structured. Applying Saussure's distinction between *parole* and *langue* to myth, Lévi-Strauss argues that it is the mythologist's task to uncover mythical *langue*, the system of fixed structures underlying *parole*.<sup>3</sup> In Freudian or Lacanian terminology, it would be the analyst's task to uncover the unconscious structure of a myth or literary case which is symptomatic at the surface level. For Lévi-Strauss, myth is a way of resolving common conflicts of people in a story. The main objection to Lévi-Strauss' approach is his neglect of the unconscious. Lévi-Strauss never desired to understand Freud, and hence did not make the step his friend Lacan made, which was to combine the findings of Saussure and Freud.

In Cambridge, England, Sir James Frazer and others developed a "myth and ritual" theory that understands myths as a way of explaining religious rituals. The problem with understanding myth as originating from a ritual, as, for instance, Jane Harrison does, is that certain myths, such as the Oedipus myth, just cannot be reduced to a ritual. Some myths are simply not of an etiological nature.

Speculating about the origins of myths, Sigmund Freud, who never developed a coherent theory of myth, suggests in "Der Dichter und das Phantasieren" ["Creative Writers and

---

<sup>3</sup> Graf, 44.



Day-Dreaming"] (1908) "daß [die Mythen] den entstellten Überresten von Wunschphantasien ganzer Nationen, den Säkularträumen der jungen Menschheit, entsprechen [that myths, for instance, are distorted vestiges of the wishful phantasies of whole nations, the secular dreams of youthful humanity]."<sup>4</sup> Freud's epoch making interpretation of the Oedipus myth in *Die Traumdeutung* [The Interpretation of Dreams] (1900-1901), which highlights many of his psychoanalytic thoughts, is well known beyond psychoanalytic circles.<sup>5</sup>

Freud was interested in the understanding of sex and the sexes, but his very own (psycho)analysis of myths is in danger of falling into transference processes. Freud devoted a whole chapter on "Die Übertragung [Transference]" in part three of his general theory of neuroses which he outlined in his early "Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse [Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis]."<sup>6</sup> "Freud knew, from the beginning, that he would only make

---

<sup>4</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch geordnet*, 18 vols. (1940-1968; Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1973-1978) (hereafter abbreviated as *GW*), 7: 222/Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 vols., trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: Hogarth, 1953-1974) (hereafter abbreviated as *SE*), 9: 152; cf. *GW* 9: 141/*SE* 13: 116.

<sup>5</sup> *GW* 2-3: 261-271/*SE* 4: 255-264.

<sup>6</sup> *GW* 11: 447-465/*SE* 16: 431-447; for an example of a transference see Freud's "Bruchstück einer Hysterie-Analyse [Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria]" in *GW* 5: 279-286/*SE* 7: 116-122.

progress in the analysis of the neuroses if he analysed himself,"<sup>7</sup> Lacan later concluded.

In any psychoanalytic interpretation, the interpreter, who is in danger of dealing with the concept of transference inadequately, may oversimplify things and thus reduce a complex work, over interpret details, or not be aware of his or her own bias.<sup>8</sup> In other words, a psychoanalytic interpretation of a myth may transfer the problems of an individual to society and thus create only another personal myth--what Lacan calls "the neurotic's individual myth."<sup>9</sup> Myth, however, must not become a means of projection for one's personal fantasies. In that instance, the interpretation or analysis may tell more about the interpreter or analyst than about the analyzed myth.

For this very reason, I will plunge into what, at first glance, may seem to be a digression, and expose the reader

---

<sup>7</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar. Book 1. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (1988; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); originally published as *Le Séminaire I* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975) (hereafter abbreviated as S), 1: 2.

<sup>8</sup> Herma and Sebastian Goeppert, "Zum Verständnis von Sprache und Übertragung in Becketts *Endspiel*," in *Psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Literaturinterpretationen*, ed. Bernd Urban and Winfried Kudzus (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981): 72-86, here 75-76; also see Lacan about the problem of transference S 1: 108-113.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Lacan, "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," trans. Martha Noel Evans, *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 48 (1979): 414; originally published as "Le mythe individuel du névrosé," (1953), text established by Jacques-Alain Miller, *Ornicar?* 17/18 (1979): 289-307.

as objectively as possible to some of my personal, subjective experiences with the myth of Narcissus. This discussion is relevant because it shows how any literary critic is always subject to, and in danger of, unconscious transference processes.

After having read Alice Miller's *Das Drama des begabten Kindes und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst* (1979),<sup>10</sup> I identified with the Narcissus figure in her very brief interpretation of the myth of Narcissus. Miller's reading of the story of Narcissus describes what she sees as the phenomenon of the "narcissistic disturbance" which leads to the drama of the gifted child in its development.<sup>11</sup> Because my mother was raped when she was a young woman, I identified with Narcissus whose mother Leiriope was raped by the river god Cephisus. It was tempting for me to identify with Narcissus because I could empathize with his problems as a teenager. As a result of this imaginary identification, I would view the rape of Narcissus' mother as the reason for his problems and suicide. Basically, I just reenacted the imaginary identification which had been described by Miller, and which sees the child as the victim of external circumstances. Even though there may be some truth to this

---

<sup>10</sup> Alice Miller, *Das Drama des begabten Kindes und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst* (1979; reprint, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983).

<sup>11</sup> For the English translation see Alice Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood*, trans. Ruth Ward (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

reading of the myth of Narcissus, it limits one's point of view and glosses over the structural elements of the myth.

According to Freud's findings about transference, the composition of a text can be an act of transference, and the reading of a text can be an act of counter-transference. In the latter case, the text may not only carry a message which the reader has to decode but may also evoke unresolved conflicts of the literary critic's early childhood. For this reason, the possibility of the literary critic's counter-transference must be considered critically when defining the theoretical approach to this study, or when analyzing the text.

While various approaches to myth have some value and bear useful results, the psychoanalytic method, which is grounded in Lacan's findings and does not superimpose a theoretical approach to a text, seems to be the most fruitful for the analysis of the fundamental structure of the myth of Narcissus. Scholarship on the ancient myth and the findings of psychoanalysis is usually characterized by a lack of connection between the two. Among scholars discussing the myth of Narcissus, classicists (e.g., Bömer)<sup>12</sup> have examined the story of Narcissus and Echo in great detail but textual criticism dominates in this field. Psychoanalysts (e.g., Freud, Lacan) or psychologists (e.g.,

---

<sup>12</sup> Bömer, 1 (1969): 536-570.

Kernberg, Kohut)<sup>13</sup> tend to ignore literary criticism. Some scholars in philosophy or the social sciences, who do not employ a sound theoretical framework, have an eclectic but flawed interest in either the myth or in the phenomenon called narcissism.<sup>14</sup> Finally, a few scholars have had some training in either the field of literary studies or in psychoanalysis--or even in both fields--and take an interdisciplinary approach.<sup>15</sup> Although these scholars will receive particular attention during this comparative study of the myth of Narcissus, it is Jacques Lacan's structural approach to narcissism which--after a critical examination of the various schools--will emerge as the most useful theoretical paradigm to analyze any literary texts in respect to their psychoanalytic implications.

#### **LITERATURE AND PSYCHOANALYSIS**

Even though students of psychoanalysis rarely refer to the myth of Narcissus, the origins of narcissism are of a literary nature. The relationship between literature and

---

<sup>13</sup> Otto Kernberg, *Borderline Conditions and Psychological Narcissism* (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975); Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self* (New York International Universities Press, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (1955; reprint, Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), 159-171; Lasch, 238 states his intent "to explore the psychological dimension of long-term shifts in the structure of cultural authority."

<sup>15</sup> Pfandl, 279-310; for a deconstructive reading, which is heavily based in philosophy, see John Brenkman, "Narcissus in the Text," *Georgia Review* 30 (1976): 293-327.

psychoanalysis is quite different from what Layton and Schapiro had believed in 1986 when they collected an anthology of essays which tried to "apply" psychoanalytic theories to literary texts.<sup>16</sup>

With the rise of psychoanalysis, which today allows us to study and interpret the nature of human relationships better, people have usually assumed that theories of the human psyche, applied to literature, can be used as a tool in interpreting literary texts. According to this view, psychoanalytic theory takes the role of a subject, analyzing literature as an object. But, as Shoshana Felman has pointed out, the application of psychoanalysis to literature overlooks some fundamental aspects of the relationship between the two fields. Felman argues that one must look at the various ways in which psychoanalysis and literature "implicate" each other:

[L]iterature has been for psychoanalysis not only a contiguous field of external verification in which to test its hypotheses and to confirm its findings, but also the constitutive texture of its *conceptual* framework, of its theoretical body. The key concepts of psychoanalysis are references to literature, using literary "*proper*" names--names of fictional characters

---

<sup>16</sup> Layton and Schapiro, 27. Note 1 on page 33 furnishes the obscure reason why the editors find Lacan dispensable: "The essays in this volume draw only on English and American theories of narcissism; Lacan and other French theorists of the self are not included. Many fine works have already appeared which introduce literary critics to the work of Lacan. The same cannot be said for the British and American theories presented here."

(Oedipus complex, Narcissism) or of historical authors (masochism, sadism). Literature, in other words, is the language which psychoanalysis uses in order to *speak of itself*.<sup>17</sup>

Maintaining that "there are no natural boundaries between literature and psychoanalysis," Felman further suggests "that in the same way that psychoanalysis points to the unconscious of literature, *literature, in its turn, is the unconscious of psychoanalysis; . . . that literature in psychoanalysis functions precisely as its 'unthought.'*"<sup>18</sup>

The revolutionary impact of psychoanalysis on literary theory is, as Terry Eagleton put it, to recognize the subtext--"a text which runs within it, visible at certain 'symptomatic' points of ambiguity, evasion or over-emphasis, and which we as readers are able to 'write' even if the novel itself does not."<sup>19</sup> Most texts contain at least one sub-text, which may be regarded as the unconscious of the text itself. Thus, what a text does not say may be as important as what it does say and how it does or does not say it. Hermeneutic suspicion is necessary because a

---

<sup>17</sup> *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), 9; originally published as *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977).

<sup>18</sup> *Literature and Psychoanalysis*, 9-10.

<sup>19</sup> Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 178; according to Eagleton, 196 earlier literary theory often helped to sustain and reinforce the assumptions of the political system.

marginal or ambivalent aspect of a text may provide a central clue to its latent content and the symbolic meaning.<sup>20</sup>

Psychoanalytic literary criticism "can tell us something about how literary texts are actually formed, and reveal something of the meaning of that formation," Eagleton says, while identifying four kinds of psychoanalytic literary criticism:

It can attend to the author of the work; to the work's contents; to its formal construction; or to the reader.<sup>21</sup>

The first two approaches are limited and problematic because psychoanalyzing the author has to remain a speculative business--as one can see with Freud's monograph "Eine Kindheitserinnerung des Leonardo da Vinci [Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood]" (1910).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, psychoanalyzing the author's intention of a literary work overlooks its formal structure and is therefore reductive--as one can see with Freud's analysis in "Der Wahn und die Träume in Wilhelm Jensens *Gradiva* [Delusions and Dreams in

---

<sup>20</sup> Eagleton, 178.

<sup>21</sup> Eagleton, 179.

<sup>22</sup> *GW* 8: 127-211/*SE* 11: 57-137.



Jensen's *Gradiva*]" (1907 [1906])).<sup>23</sup> However, the latter two, psychoanalytic literary criticism attending to the formal construction of a text and criticism attending to the reader, can be useful in illuminating texts from all genres to provide a central clue to their latent content, or to clarify the relationship between reader and text.

The formal construction of a text often resembles the mechanisms of the dream-work which Freud outlined in *Die Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*] (1900). "Like the dream, the work [of literature] takes certain 'raw materials'--language, other literary texts, ways of perceiving the world--and transforms them by certain techniques into a product."<sup>24</sup> The dream is not just an expression of the unconscious. Rather, the essence of a dream is the dream-work itself, which is the process of production. Likewise, literary texts can be seen as such a form of production.<sup>25</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> GW 7: 29-125/SE 9: 1-95.

<sup>24</sup> Eagleton, 181.

<sup>25</sup> Goeppert, 72: "Eine psychoanalytische Interpretation begreift den literarischen Text als Ergebnis assoziativer Prozesse des psychischen Primärvorgangs (Verdichtung, Verschiebung, Symbolisierung), als Kompromißbildung aus Triebwunsch und Verdrängungswiderstand; der manifeste Text kann nach entsprechenden Dechiffrierungsregeln aufgelöst werden und aus den dadurch gewonnenen Elementen läßt sich der latente Sinn des Werkes rekonstruieren [A psychoanalytic interpretation understands a literary text as a result of associative processes of the primary psychic process (condensation, displacement, symbolization), as a compromise of one's drive and repression resistance; the manifest text can be decoded according to certain

Psychoanalytic literary criticism is one of various approaches to literature; it is selective because it does not attempt to interpret a literary work as an aesthetic whole, but rather focuses on the essential structure, i.e., the formal construction of a literary text. And at any point, the literary critic, i.e., the reader analyzing the text, has to be careful of his or her own possible transference processes--which have been described above. Often, psychoanalytic literary criticism can help to clarify the relationship between reader and text.

This study, however, will focus on the formal construction of literary texts in which the narcissistic structure functions as the unthought of a fundamental aspect of our culture, i.e., the incest prohibition. Just as the myth of Oedipus embodies the results of people acting out their incestuous desire, the myth of Narcissus embodies the results of people repressing their incestuous desire. The myth of Oedipus and the myth of Narcissus form, so to speak, the two sides of the same coin which deals with the incest

---

decoding rules, and the latent content of a work can be reconstructed through the elements which have been obtained in this way]." 83:" Psychoanalytisches Interpretieren, das wie jedes Interpretieren Form, Inhalt und Bedeutung eines Gegenstandes oder Sachverhalts aufzuschlüsseln sucht, erhebt darüber hinaus den Anspruch, vorwiegend seine latenten Sinnzusammenhänge, also die 'Tiefendimension' eines Textes zu beleuchten, die mit anderen wissenschaftlichen Methoden nicht zu erfassen sind [Any psychoanalytic interpretation, which, like any other kind of interpretation, attempts to decode form, contents, and meaning of a topic or case, further claims to primarily illuminate latent meaning in context, i.e., the 'deep structure' of a text which cannot be grasped with other scientific methods]."

prohibition. While the myth of Oedipus describes the consequences of violating the incest prohibition, the myth of Narcissus deals with the consequences of conforming to the incest prohibition.

#### **NARCISSUS AND PSYCHOANALYTIC LITERARY CRITICISM**

In 1911, when Freud had just started to think about narcissism, "[Otto] Rank had published '*Ein Beitrag zum Narzissmus*', and in the essay '*Der Doppelgänger*' (1914) he seems to have been the first to use the word 'narcissism' in connection with literary criticism."<sup>26</sup> In 1914, Sigmund Freud wrote "*Zur Einführung des Narzißmus* [On Narcissism]" but his essay does not mention the classical myth at all.<sup>27</sup> In 1935, Ludwig Pfandl's "*Der Narzißbegriff: Versuch einer neuen Deutung*," which was published in *Imago: Zeitschrift für psychoanalytische Psychologie, ihre Grenzgebiete und Anwendungen* (edited by Sigmund Freud), was an attempt to interpret the myth of Narcissus on a psychoanalytic basis. Pfandl was among the first scholars to point out the relationship between Ovid's version of the myth and Freud's findings about neurotic narcissistic behavior.

In 1990, Norman N. Holland noted that the concept of narcissism is "just beginning to percolate literary circles

---

<sup>26</sup> Vinge, 51 referring to Otto Rank, "*Der Doppelgänger*," *Imago* 3 (1914): 97-164.

<sup>27</sup> *GW* 10: 137-170/*SE* 14: 73-102.

but there has already been one anthology of criticism . . . based on Kohut's theory of the self."<sup>28</sup> Layton claims "that critics have found theories of narcissism developed by Kohut, Kernberg, and the British object relations school (Klein, Fairbairn, Guntrip, Winnicott) helpful in dealing with texts that seem to resist interpretation by classical psychoanalytic theory."<sup>29</sup> In reality, however, the story of Narcissus resisted the interpretation by classical psychoanalytic, i.e., Freudian, theory and those above mentioned theories because they kept being imbued by Freud's biologism. For example, Freud would view the death drive as an instinct in the realm of biology--an notion which Lacan dismissed later in *Écrits*.<sup>30</sup> Even though Pfandl made a first attempt at understanding Ovid's version of the myth through Freud's eyes, he was still far from employing a structural approach in his attempt at treating Ovid's text as a literary case.

The psychoanalytic reading of the myth of Narcissus in classical literature in the next chapter will show that a

---

<sup>28</sup> Norman N. Holland, *Holland's Guide to Psychoanalytic Psychology and Literature-and-Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 49-50 referring to Layton and Schapiro.

<sup>29</sup> Lynne Layton, "From Oedipus to Narcissus: Literature and the Psychology of the Self," *Mosaic* 18 (1985): 98.

<sup>30</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits. A Selection*, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton: 1977) (hereafter abbreviated as *E*), 101-103; originally published as *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).

myth encoded in a text can be taken as a literary case. According to François Regnault, "[a] case is an exception to the law it [nevertheless] belongs to."<sup>31</sup> The case illustrates the set or law it belongs to but, because of its absolute singularity, the case also contradicts the general class, or law. According to Lacan, literary examples are not really clinical cases (*experimenta crucis*, or crucial experiments, cases which prove something) but *experimenta mentis* (experiments in the mind) taking place in what is ordinarily called applied or theoretical psychoanalysis.<sup>32</sup> Lacan argues that psychoanalysis cannot be applied to literary cases because as a treatment psychoanalysis can only be applied to a subject who speaks and listens.<sup>33</sup> Literary figures, in contrast, "are not the subjects of any cure; they are rather applied to psychoanalysis."<sup>34</sup> In this sense, neither Lacan nor Freud tried to "apply" psychoanalysis to literature. A psychoanalytic reading of

---

<sup>31</sup> François Regnault, "Lacan and Experience," in Alexandre Leupin, ed., *Lacan and the Human Sciences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), 43-58, here 47.

<sup>32</sup> Regnault, 44-57.

<sup>33</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966), 747: "La psychanalyse ne s'applique, au sens propre, que comme traitement, et donc à un sujet qui parle et qui entend [Psychoanalysis is only applicable in the strict sense as a treatment, and thus to a speaking subject who hears and understands]."

<sup>34</sup> Regnault, 55.

literary texts, however, can indeed make visible the structures in which clinical and literary cases coincide.

The symptoms of a literary case form the surface structure of a myth, or, as observed above, a text becomes "visible at certain 'symptomatic' points of ambiguity, evasion or overemphasis."<sup>35</sup> As literary manifestations differ throughout the course of literary history, the symptoms of literary cases at the surface level change--a fact which can already be observed in the realm of classical literature.

A particular literary case, like the myth of Narcissus, also forms a deep structure of permanent quality. The permanent quality of a literary case is reflected in the study of literary themes such as the Narcissus theme. A literary theme is the law, or, in this instance, a mythical structure, which holds true despite the many variants of an individual myth. The Narcissus theme forms the law of a particular myth, i.e., the myth of Narcissus and its literary manifestations; the variants of this myth form the instances of and simultaneously the exceptions to this law but still belong to the same law. The ideal, then, is, as Regnault argues, "to have one case considered as paradigmatic (rather than canonical)."<sup>36</sup> Every singular

---

<sup>35</sup> Eagleton, 178.

<sup>36</sup> Regnault, 50.

literary case makes possible the interpretation of its own structure, the class thus constituted of all these singular cases "has some chance to be inconsistent."<sup>37</sup>

The singularity of a literary case is unconscious and, to a certain degree, beyond words, description, representation, or formalization. Therefore, the formalization of a case is necessarily incomplete. Formalization always stops short against a kernel of meaning that cannot be formalized, i.e., the unconscious or desire. Lacan also realized that, even though mathematical formalization may purify a literary case of its ambiguity, formulas will always fail at describing the unconscious kernel of being because these formulas have to be explained in common language and "because there is no way to say it all. Saying all the truth is literally impossible: words fail. Yet it's through this very impossibility that truth holds onto the real."<sup>38</sup> Thus, some degree of incompleteness and ambiguity is in the last analysis unavoidable. The necessary incompleteness, however, does not invalidate the scientific ideal of theoretical psychoanalysis, which is to strive towards a mathematical theorem, i.e., a set of

---

<sup>37</sup> Regnault, 50.

<sup>38</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Television*, ed. Joan Copjec, trans. Dennis Hollier, Rosalind Kraus, and Annette Michelson (New York: W. W. Norton: 1990), 3; originally published as *Télévision* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).

totally transmissible written formulas. Human sciences thus are conjectural sciences because science itself is by definition forever incomplete. With any given case, however, one can and should try to conjecture and calculate as much of its meaning as possible.

The study of the influence of a certain myth or story has its value in detecting and establishing a literary theme such as the Narcissus theme.<sup>39</sup> The narcissistic structure, however, can also be found in literary texts in which the myth of Narcissus is neither an explicit nor an implied theme. A comparative analysis of the narcissistic structure in modern literary texts shows that the fundamental aspects of this myth--including the suicidal tendencies of the narcissistically structured human being--potentially affect any literary figure and any human being as long as their culture is based on incest prohibition. The narcissistic structure informs texts of various genres, as a psychoanalytic reading of three entirely different texts suggests. With the advent of psychoanalysis and due to the work of Sigmund Freud, the myth of Narcissus has been translated from the world of poetry into that of

---

<sup>39</sup> Vinge's book, which records the reception of a literary theme in later times but remains within the realm of influence study, is still valuable as a source book of the Narcissus theme; for a more recent overview of all the writers who took up the Narcissus theme see Jane D. Reid, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s*, 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2: 692-702.



psychoanalysis, as Kochhar-Lindgren says.<sup>40</sup> Or in Felman's words, literature informed psychoanalysis. With the generic shift from ancient poetry to modern prose, non-fictional explanations of material formerly considered purely fictional were sought.

"Freud's progress," Lacan says, "lies in the way he considers the singularity of a case."<sup>41</sup> Marshall W. Alcorn, Jr., in turn, expands on this point in the following way:

Literature can be original because it is often, as analysts claim, the *symptom* of a singular subject. It is a singular expression because it speaks to and speaks of singular narcissistic conflict, those forces closest to the substance and image of a particularly configured subjectivity. It may be the case, for example, that texts expressing the symptoms of subjectivity, rather than a simple fantasy of coherence, hold the strongest rhetorical power.<sup>42</sup>

The task remains to treat Ovid's text as a literary case, and analyze the degree to which Narcissus' symptoms coincide with any clinical case of a neurosis.

---

<sup>40</sup> Gray Kochhar-Lindgren, *Narcissus Transformed: The Textual Subject in Psychoanalysis and Literature* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>41</sup> S 1: 12.

<sup>42</sup> Marshall W. Alcorn, *Narcissism and the Literary Libido: Rhetoric, Text, and Subjectivity* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 213.

## DEFINITIONS OF NARCISSISM

Before psychoanalysis took hold of the term, narcissism was used to describe a clinical phenomenon, i.e., a sexual perversion which is characterized as treating one's own body as a sexual object, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) tells us.<sup>43</sup> "The clinical use of the term 'narcissism' originated with Havelock Ellis, for whom it meant only an autoerotic sexuality, and passed through the hands of Paul Näcke, who coined the term *Narzißmus* in his comments on Ellis' research."<sup>44</sup> Between 1909 and 1911, the term appears in the psychoanalytical writings of Sadger and Rank.<sup>45</sup> Sadger, then, was the first to treat narcissism (reflecting a genetic aspect) as part of the regular course of human sexual development.<sup>46</sup> Freud uses the term "*Narzißmus*" for the first time in 1910 in the second edition of *Drei*

---

<sup>43</sup> GW 10: 138/SE 14: 73.

<sup>44</sup> Kochhar-Lindgren, 19. The term "narcissism" was not created by Näcke, as erroneously stated in GW 10: 138/SE 14: 73, but by Ellis; Freud corrected himself in a later edition of *Three Essays on Sexuality*; cf. GW 5: 119 note 3/SE 7: 218 note 3; Laplanche and Pontalis, 255-257.

<sup>45</sup> Judith Valk, "Der Narzißmus in der psychoanalytischen Theorie: historische Betrachtung und Kritik," in *Die neuen Narzißmustheorien: Zurück ins Paradies?*, ed. Psychoanalytisches Seminar Zürich (Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1981; reprint, Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1993), 14.

<sup>46</sup> GW 10: 138/SE 14: 73.

*Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie [Three Essays on Sexuality]* (1905).<sup>47</sup>

Even though the myth of Narcissus provided the name for the term "narcissism," Freud began to develop his thoughts on narcissism without references to the ancient myth. His 1914 landmark publication "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus [On Narcissism]" greatly contributed to a first definition of narcissism. Freud remains important for any study of narcissism because he was the first major figure to employ a psychoanalytic approach in discussing what then became the concept of narcissism.

Freud's article on narcissistic object love has remained indispensable as a starting point for any psychoanalytic study of, and for a basic understanding of, narcissism. The psychoanalytic method and the article "On Narcissism," then, have remained important for Freud's successors in shaping their own theoretical basis. Whether it is the school of Self Psychology, which, in a basically behaviorist approach, privileges only certain aspects of Freud's theory, or Lacan, who employs Freud's essential concept of the unconscious, Freud still serves as a reference point for all types of students in psychoanalysis and psychology.

---

<sup>47</sup> GW 5: 119 note 3/SE 7: 218 note 3.

"Although the myth of Narcissus is two thousand years old, psychologists did not begin to explore its implications until the end of the nineteenth century," Jeffrey Berman noted.<sup>48</sup> Following Sadger, Freud suggested that narcissism no longer be considered a perversion; he defined this concept as "*die libidinöse Ergänzung zum Egoismus des Selbsterhaltungstriebes, von dem jedem Lebewesen mit Recht ein Stück zugeschrieben wird* [the libidinal complement of the egoism of the instinct of self-preservation, a measure of which may justifiably be attributed to every living creature]."<sup>49</sup>

Freud thought "*daß eine als Narzißmus zu bezeichnende Unterbringung der Libido in viel weiterem Umfang in Betracht kommen und eine Stelle in der regulären Sexualentwicklung des Menschen beanspruchen könnte* [that an allocation of the libido such as deserved to be described as narcissism might be far more extensive, and that it might claim a place in the regular course of human sexual development]."<sup>50</sup> In those two passages, taken from "On Narcissism," the key phrases for the interpretation of the myth of Narcissus are "regular" and "to every living creature."

---

<sup>48</sup> Jeffrey Berman, *Narcissism and the Novel* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 2.

<sup>49</sup> GW 10: 139/SE 14: 73-74.

<sup>50</sup> GW 10: 138/SE 14: 73.

In the words of Freud's student and later colleague, Lou Andreas-Salomé: "*Also kein Beschränktsein auf [ein] einzelnes Libidostadium, sondern als unser Stück Selbstliebe alle Stadien begleitend; nicht primärer Ausgangspunkt der Entwicklung nur, sondern primär im Sinne basisbildener Dauer bis in alle späteren Objektbesetzungen der Libido hinein* [Accordingly, narcissism is not limited to a single phase of the libido, but is a part of our self-love which accompanies all phases. It is not merely a primitive point of departure of development but remains as a kind of fundamental continuity in all the subsequent object-cathexes of the libido]."<sup>51</sup>

Unfortunately, the school of ego psychology and Heinz Kohut, who preferred to return to the nineteenth century view of narcissism as an illness, did not realize that, as Andreas-Salomé had already noted in a letter from the end of August 1913, "narcissism accompanies all the strata of our experience, independently of them. In other words, it is

---

<sup>51</sup> Lou Andreas-Salomé, "Narzissmus als Doppelrichtung," in Inge Weber and Brigitte Rempp, eds., *Lou Andreas-Salomé: Das 'zweideutige' Lächeln der Erotik. Texte zur Psychoanalyse* (Freiburg: Kore, 1990), 191; originally published in *Imago* 7 (1921): 361-386/"The Dual Orientation of Narcissism," trans. Stanley A. Leavy, in *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 31 (1962): 1-30, here 3.

not only an immature stage of life needing to be superseded, but also the ever-renewing companion of all life."<sup>52</sup>

Freud acknowledged Andreas-Salomé's insight in 1914 when he wrote: "*Wir bilden so die Vorstellung einer ursprünglichen Libidobesetzung des Ichs, von der später an die Objekte abgegeben wird, die aber im Grunde genommen, verbleibt und sich zu den Objektbesetzungen verhält wie der Körper eines Protoplasmatierchens zu den von ihm ausgeschickten Pseudopodien* [Thus we form the idea of there being an original libidinal cathexis of the ego, from which some is later given off to objects, but which fundamentally persists and is related to the object-cathexes much as the body of an amoeba is related to the pseudopodia which it puts out]."<sup>53</sup> Freud's complicated language conceals a simple assertion: the existence of libido does not change, there is only a change in its direction from the ego to other objects.

In the development of the human being, Freud distinguished "*sekundärer Narzißmus* [secondary narcissism]," which, supposedly, evolves later in life, from "*primärer Narzißmus* [primary narcissism]" which he considered a normal transitional phase of the child. During the stage of

---

<sup>52</sup> Lou Andreas-Salomé, *The Freud Journal*, trans. Stanley A. Leavy (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 164; originally published as *In der Schule bei Freud* (Zurich: Max Niehans Verlag, 1958).

<sup>53</sup> GW 10: 140-141/SE 14: 75.

primary narcissism, a child inevitably displays autoerotic tendencies. Freud assumed "*daß eine dem Ich vergleichbare Einheit nicht von Anfang an im Individuum vorhanden ist; das Ich muß entwickelt werden. Die autoerotischen Triebe sind aber uranfänglich; es muß also irgend etwas zum Autoerotismus hinzukommen, eine neue psychische Aktion, um den Narzißmus zu gestalten* [that a unity comparable to the ego cannot exist in the individual from the start; the ego has to be developed. The auto-erotic instincts, however, are there from the very first; so there must be something added to auto-erotism--a new psychical action--in order to bring about narcissism]." <sup>54</sup>

According to Judith Valk, that "something" refers to the development of the ego which then can be directed towards an object other than one's own image.<sup>55</sup> When Freud asserts the dichotomy between ego-libido and object-libido, he gives another definition of narcissism: "*Die der Außenwelt entzogene Libido ist dem Ich zugeführt worden, so daß ein Verhalten entstand, welches wir Narzißmus heißen können* [The libido that has been withdrawn from the external world has been directed to the ego and thus gives rise to an

---

<sup>54</sup> GW 10: 142/SE 14: 77; the English translation for "Triebe" should read "drives." Freud refers to the unconscious of human beings here, not to animal instincts.

<sup>55</sup> Valk in *Die neuen Narzißmustheorien*, 17.

attitude which may be called narcissism]." <sup>56</sup> In Freud's libido theory--as in Lacan's theory of the mirror stages--there seems to be a development of the ego. This is a problematic assumption because object love, as Freud himself noticed above, really exists from the beginning. The switch of one's object love to an object other than oneself is merely a displacement of the object--and not a development of the ego. Freud's theory of libido is difficult to define because it evolved together with the instinct theory. <sup>57</sup> After Freud's biologism is removed, i.e., after the concept of instincts have been removed from the theory of libido, the idea of libido still has its value for psychoanalysis. However, libido cannot be desexualized--as Jung claimed.

In Freud's libido theory, the ego is a source of sexual energy. <sup>58</sup> The ego-ideal or super-ego, in contrast, which is another representation for the parental expectations of the child and similar critical sources such as teachers and society, represses desire. If a child forms an ego-ideal in itself, it will direct its desire in a displaced narcissistic identification onto this ego-ideal:

---

<sup>56</sup> GW 10: 140/SE 14: 75.

<sup>57</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, 239.

<sup>58</sup> GW 10: 141/SE 14: 76.



Wir können sagen, der eine habe ein Ideal in sich aufgerichtet, an welchem er sein aktuelles Ich mißt, während dem anderen eine solche Idealbildung abgehe. Die Idealbildung wäre von seiten des Ichs die Bedingung der Verdrängung.

Diesem Idealich gilt nun die Selbstliebe, welche in der Kindheit das wirkliche Ich genoß. Der Narzißmus erscheint auf das neue ideale Ich verschoben.

[We can say that the one man has set up an ideal in himself by which he measures his actual ego, while the other has formed no such ideal. For the ego the formation of an ideal would be the conditioning factor of repression.

This ideal ego is now the target of the self-love which was enjoyed in childhood by the actual ego. The subject's narcissism makes its appearance displaced on to this new ideal ego].<sup>59</sup>

In Lacanian terminology, the narcissistic identification marks a shift of one's desire from the register of the Real (R) to the imaginary sphere (I).

In "*Zur Einführung des Narzißmus*," Freud, who, first of all, was a physician, also makes an interesting assumption about the relationship between narcissism and health, affirming the idea that it is necessary to love somebody other than oneself to stay healthy: "*Ein starker Egoismus schützt vor Erkrankung, aber man muß endlich beginnen zu lieben, um nicht krank zu werden, und muß erkranken, wenn man infolge von Versagung nicht lieben kann* [A strong egoism is a protection against falling ill, but in the last resort we must begin to love in order not to fall ill, and we are

---

<sup>59</sup> GW 10: 161/SE 14: 93-94.

bound to fall ill if, in consequence of frustration, we are unable to love]."<sup>60</sup> The loss of love, Freud argues in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*] (1920), leaves behind a permanent injury to one's self-esteem in the form of a "narzißtische Narbe [narcissistic scar], ' which contributes more than anything else to the "Minderwertigkeitsgefühl [sense of inferiority]' so common in neurotics.<sup>61</sup> But the loss of the unanalyzed transference people commonly call love is pre-programmed in and by any society that is based on the incest prohibition.

In "Das Unbehagen in der Kultur [Civilization and Its Discontent]" (1930), Freud cites society oppressing one's desire, Lacan's field of the symbolic (S), as the reason why everybody is to some extent neurotic: "Man fand, daß der Mensch neurotisch wird, weil er das Maß an Versagung nicht ertragen kann, daß ihm die Gesellschaft im Dienste ihrer kulturellen Ideale auferlegt [It was discovered that a person becomes neurotic because he cannot tolerate the amount of frustration which society imposes on him in the service of its cultural ideals]."<sup>62</sup> In terms of psychoanalysis, however, happiness should be achieved through the realization of one's desire. Yet Freud has to

---

<sup>60</sup> GW 10: 151-152/SE 14: 85.

<sup>61</sup> GW 13: 19/SE 18: 20.

<sup>62</sup> GW 14: 446/SE 21: 87.

concede: "*Die individuelle Freiheit ist kein Kulturgut* [The liberty of the individual is no gift of civilization]:"<sup>63</sup>

Von seiten der Kultur ist die Tendenz zur Einschränkung des Sexuallebens nicht minder deutlich als die andere zur Ausdehnung des Kulturkreises. Schon die erste Kulturphase, die des Totemismus, bringt das Verbot der inzestösen Objektwahl mit sich, vielleicht die einschneidendste Verstümmelung, die das menschliche Liebesleben im Laufe der Zeiten erfahren hat.

The tendency on the part of civilization to restrict sexual life is no less clear than its other tendency to expand the cultural unit. Its first, totemic, phase already brings with it the prohibition against an incestuous choice of object, and this is perhaps the most drastic mutilation which man's erotic life has in all time experienced.<sup>64</sup>

The problems associated with Freud's introduction to narcissism include his biologism which comes with his libido theory. In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud admits that his written account of the psychic operations of the mind is provisional.<sup>65</sup> This is a point of departure for Lacan who found it extremely difficult to maintain the distinction

---

<sup>63</sup> GW 14: 455/SE 21: 95.

<sup>64</sup> GW 14: 463/SE 21: 104.

<sup>65</sup> GW 5: 118-119/SE 7: 218: "Eine Fortführung der Libidotheorie ist deshalb vorläufig nur auf dem Wege der Spekulation möglich [For the present, therefore, no further development of the libido theory is possible, except upon speculative lines]."

between egotistical and sexual libido and chose a structural approach to explain the phenomenon of narcissism.<sup>66</sup>

Any study of texts that is not anchored in an analysis of concrete language but in abstract, metaphysical drives remains highly speculative, Lacan argues. Hence, he saves Freud's theory by transforming the death drive, which Freud juxtaposes with the sex drive, into the sphere of the Law or Symbolic (S), while placing the sex drive--stripped of its biological connotations--in the realm of the unconscious or Real (R).

Although none of Freud's major case studies directly involves a discussion of narcissism, he proclaimed in "Civilization and its Discontent:" *"Der Begriff Narzißmus machte es möglich, die traumatische Neurose sowie viele den Psychosen nahestehende Affektionen und diese selbst analytisch zu erfassen* [The concept of narcissism made it possible to obtain an analytic understanding of the traumatic neuroses and of many of the affections bordering on the psychoses, as well as of the latter themselves]."<sup>67</sup> While Freud helped narcissism to become one of the central concepts of psychoanalytic investigation, he was not concerned with the literary implications of this particular myth. Because of the metaphysical nature of Freud's

---

<sup>66</sup> S 1: 114-115.

<sup>67</sup> GW 14, 477/SE 21: 118.

writings on narcissism, the body of theoretical writings attempting to define narcissism continued to grow, especially from the 1950s on.

The recent complaint by Christopher Lasch that the term "narcissism" is used so loosely that it retains little of its psychological content has been spurred by Freud himself, whose approach toward narcissism is rather unsystematic.<sup>68</sup> For instance, the term "ego," which more or less corresponds with the later term "self," is not used consistently, and Freud's libido theory remains so contradictory that it has spawned a number of very different interpretations. Freud's use of the term differs considerably in the course of his career because he would not revise his earlier writings after fundamentally changing his theories in the mid-1920s.<sup>69</sup> In "Narcissism: The Term and the Concept," Sydney E. Pulver lists a number of various usages for the concept: narcissism as a sexual perversion, developmental stage, mode of relating to objects, and as self-esteem.<sup>70</sup>

The terms "narcissism" and "narcissistic" are frequently used, possibly over-used, and rarely accurately

---

<sup>68</sup> Lasch, 31.

<sup>69</sup> For a summary of problems with Freud's "Zur Einführung des Narzißmus" see Valk in *Die neuen Narzißmustheorien*, 13-14 and Berman, 14-19.

<sup>70</sup> Sydney E. Pulver, "Narcissism: The Term and the Concept," in *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, ed. Andrew P. Morrison (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 91-111.

defined. Narcissism, by reference to the myth of Narcissus, is defined by Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis as "love directed towards the image of oneself."<sup>71</sup> According to this definition, a narcissist is someone who loves an image more than he or she loves anybody else. Narcissism, defined as obsessive self-love, usually carries negative overtones. Clinical terms like "pathological narcissism" perpetuate such a negative perspective.<sup>72</sup> Even though, according to Kohut, positive aspects of narcissism include an increased amount of creativity, the negative view of narcissism remains prevalent. According to Paul Zweig, the negative overtones of narcissism also seem to be a product of the very influential Christian heritage in Western societies, which contrast self-love so sharply with the Christian ideal of loving the other. In this context, Narcissus' self-reflection and his self-love are considered a religious sin, "a gateway to man's fall."<sup>73</sup>

The negative overtones of self-love did not affect Freud's view of narcissism because, unlike in society, there

---

<sup>71</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, 255.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. the essays by Annie Reich, "Pathological Forms of Self-Esteem Regulation" and by Marjorie Taggart White, "Self Relations, Object Relations, and Pathological Narcissism" in *Essential Papers on Narcissism*, 44-60 and 144-164 respectively.

<sup>73</sup> Paul Zweig, *The Heresy of Self-Love: A Study of Subversive Individualism* (1968; reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 14; also see, for instance, St. Augustine's famous remark in *De Civitate Dei* 14.28 on the character of the two cities.

is no sexual norm in psychoanalysis. However, the negative image of self-love did influence the way in which American society perceived narcissism as a personality disorder. The rise of behaviorism in psychological circles before 1950 had its impact on the definition of narcissism in America.

Neither the first (1952) edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-I)* nor the second (1968) edition (*DSM-II*), published by the American Psychiatric Association, list more than a brief description of what first was labeled as "passive-aggressive personality." The seminal works by Otto Kernberg and Heinz Kohut may have caused the association to completely re-write the entry of this personality "disorder," recognized as "narcissistic personality disorder" in 1980, and to list it for the first time in the third edition (*DSM-III*).<sup>74</sup> Hence, these definitions are not Freudian, i.e., psychoanalytic in nature. Previously, the "narcissistic personality disorder" of 1980 (*DSM-III* code number 301.81) was subsumed under "Passive-aggressive personality" in 1968 (with the same *DSM-II* code number of 301.81) and in 1952 (with a different *DSM-I* code number of 51.1).<sup>75</sup>

---

<sup>74</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980), 315-317.

<sup>75</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II)*, 2nd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1968), 78. The personality disorder, labeled as "Passive-aggressive personality" (301.81), is defined as follows:

The diagnostic criteria of the clinical phenomenon, known as "narcissistic personality disorder," have not changed significantly from the third (1980) edition (*DSM-III*) over the revised third (1987) edition (*DSM-III-R*) to the fourth (1994) edition (*DSM-IV*).<sup>76</sup> "Narcissistic personality disorder" is defined as "a pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts, as indicated by five (or more) of the following" diagnostic criteria:

- (1) has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements)
- (2) is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love
- (3) believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high status people (or institutions)
- (4) requires excessive admiration

---

This behavior pattern is characterized by both passivity and aggressiveness. The aggressiveness may be expressed passively, for example, by obstructionism, pouting, procrastination, intentional inefficiency, or stubbornness. This behavior commonly reflects hostility which the individual feels he dare not express openly. Often the behavior is one expression of the patient's resentment at failing to find gratification in a relationship with an individual or institution upon which he is over-dependent (pp. 43-44).

<sup>76</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994), 658-661.



(5) has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations

(6) is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her needs

(7) lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with feelings and needs of others

(8) is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her

(9) shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.<sup>77</sup>

According to *DSM-IV*, males, at 50%-75%, are diagnosed more often with narcissistic personality disorder, and narcissistic traits "may be particularly common in adolescents."<sup>78</sup> The *DSM-IV* list of criteria, which are based on observation, confirms the frequent occurrence of a phenomenon of which Freud already said in 1914 that it "may justifiably be attributed to every living creature."<sup>79</sup> Because the American Psychiatric Association considers people's behavior rather than the unconscious, the definition of "narcissistic personality disorder" is not Freudian, i.e., psychoanalytic in nature.

In a recent study, Klaus Schlagmann argues that one should no longer refer to narcissism as "ego-centric self-

---

<sup>77</sup> *DSM-IV*, 661.

<sup>78</sup> *DSM-IV*, 660.

<sup>79</sup> [GW 10: 139]/SE 14: 73-74; my emphasis.

love." Terms such as "narcissistic personality disorder," which suggest an abnormal, unhealthy behavior, have been coined in a misleading way and used for too long, and should, therefore, be avoided altogether.<sup>80</sup> Instead of labeling the development of a child as "primary narcissism," one should rather refer to this early childhood stage as a period of natural needs (*unhinterfragbare Ansprüche*), Schlagmann argues. The needs of a baby have to be met as best as possible but the "narcissistic disturbance" is inevitable to a certain degree in any society that has based its culture on the incest prohibition. Under those conditions, the child's disappointment that his or her desire for completeness will not be met fully will arise--even if the parents take perfect care of their child.

The diagnostic criteria of the American Psychiatric Association overlook the fact that, as a latent, structural configuration, narcissism potentially affects everyone. Narcissism exists from the beginning, and not just from the beginning of "early adulthood." While I understand narcissism, with Lacan, as a latent structure that acquires a livelihood with our birth, it seems to be appropriate to distinguish between narcissism as a theoretical and a clinical phenomenon. On the theoretical level, narcissistic identification will emerge as long as culture prevails. As

---

<sup>80</sup> Schlagmann, 44-45.

long as incest prohibition exists, people will be disturbed by the consequences of that prohibition, and narcissism is likely to become symptomatic in people's lives to some degree.

Because people cannot fulfill their incestuous desire, they search for completeness in another realm. In an act of displacement, most people identify with an image. This identification process, which may pertain to one's own or some other image, can be captured under the term "narcissism." A person not understanding the mechanisms of the narcissistic configuration will be more likely to suffer from the symptoms which the American Psychiatric Association lists as diagnostic criteria.

On the clinical level, a person who displays two or three of these behaviors is viewed by society as selfish or egotistical. In contrast, a person who displays eight or nine of these behaviors is viewed as suffering from a personality disorder, and needing therapy. In extreme cases, as the literary examples of Narcissus, Captain Ahab, and Gustav von Aschenbach will show, narcissism can kill, and psychologists may support people in recognizing the frustrating mechanisms of the narcissistic structure and coping with the violent and suicidal aspects of this configuration.

## EGO AND SELF PSYCHOLOGY

The definition of narcissism by the American Psychiatric Association is closely linked to the works of Heinz Kohut's school of self psychology. Two American professors of psychiatry, Otto Kernberg in *Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism* (1975) and Heinz Kohut in *The Analysis of the Self* (1971), fundamentally shaped the current discourse on narcissism. "The more classical view of narcissism has been set forth by Otto Kernberg, influenced by Melanie Klein and the British school of object relations. The more revolutionary view comes from Heinz Kohut, who, until his death in 1981, was the founder and leader of a new school of psychoanalysis called self psychology."<sup>81</sup>

In the vein of Freud's daughter Anna, Kohut developed his main ideas in "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism" (1966) which were elaborated in *The Analysis of the Self*.<sup>82</sup> Even though Kohut wanted to separate psychoanalysis from Freud's libido theory, he did not move away too far from Freud's biologism. Despite its irrational aspects, Kohut's self psychology has been very popular within the United

---

<sup>81</sup> Berman, 19; for a graphic of the various theoretical schools focusing on the ego or self see Victoria Hamilton, *Narcissus and Oedipus: The Children of Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), 28.

<sup>82</sup> Heinz Kohut, "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 14 (1966): 243-272.

States up to the present. Adapting Kohut's theory of the self, Alice Miller developed an interpretation of the myth of Narcissus, which seems very plausible at first glance.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, it will be beneficial to summarize Kohut's theory of the self now.<sup>84</sup>

Heinz Kohut's theory limits itself to only a single aspect of Freud's early and inadequate belief: "*die Psychotherapie kann keinen anderen Weg einschlagen, als das Ubw der Herrschaft des Vbw zu unterwerfen [psychotherapy can pursue no other course than to bring the Ucs. under the domination of the Pcs.]*."<sup>85</sup> The idea of adapting the behavior of a human being to the norms of society, sometimes referred to as preconscious, sometimes called superego, contradicts Freud's thoughts about the unconscious.

The main problem with Kohut's approach is his distortion of Freud's preference of the unconscious--that Kohut favors the consciousness and the outer world of the environment over the unconscious. But Kohut's "reality,"

---

<sup>83</sup> Alice Miller, "Depression and Grandiosity as Related Forms of Narcissistic Disturbances," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 6 (1979): 61-76.

<sup>84</sup> For the following account see J. Brooks Bouson, *The Empathic Reader: A Study of the Narcissistic Character and the Drama of the Self* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 11-29; for a very critical discussion of Kohut's theory see Johannes Cremerius, "Kohuts Behandlungstechnik. Eine kritische Analyse," in *Die neuen Narzißmustheorien*, 83-123.

<sup>85</sup> GW 2-3: 584; printed in spaced type in the German text from 1919 onwards/SE 5: 578.

depending on the signifier, thus remains an imaginary construct. As such, Kohut's "reality" represses the very idea of the unconscious which can never be verbalized fully. Freud already emphasized the importance of the unconscious in *Die Traumdeutung* [*The Interpretation of Dreams*]:

Das Unbewußte ist der größere Kreis, der den kleineren des Bewußten in sich einschließt; alles Bewußte hat eine unbewußte Vorstufe, während das Unbewußte auf dieser Stufe stehenbleiben und doch den vollen Wert einer psychischen Leistung beanspruchen kann. Das Unbewußte ist das eigentlich reale Psychische, uns nach seiner inneren Natur so unbekannt wie das Reale der Außenwelt und uns durch die Daten des Bewußtseins ebenso unvollständig gegeben wie die Außenwelt durch die Angaben unserer Sinnesorgane.

The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. Everything conscious has an unconscious preliminary stage; whereas what is unconscious may remain at that stage and nevertheless claim to be regarded as having the full value of a psychical process. The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs.<sup>86</sup>

Kohut's theory of the self revolves around the parent-child relationship. In Kohut's developmental model, a child is narcissistically damaged "because of traumatic empathic failures on the part of the parents."<sup>87</sup> According to Kohut,

---

<sup>86</sup> GW 2-3: 617-618/SE 5: 612-613.

<sup>87</sup> Bouson, 16.

with each empathic failure, the narcissistically damaged person experiences repressed or expressed feelings of anger. If parents cannot respond empathically to the child's needs, Kohut argues, and thus undermine the development of the child's health, that individual will always remain in fear of disintegration and in search of its self as an adult.<sup>88</sup> But because one's identity is and will always remain partly unconscious and thus unknown, every human being will be neurotic to a certain degree.

The psychoanalytic cure based on Kohut's self psychology calls for "a three-step movement" which results in "the opening of a path of empathy between self and selfobject."<sup>89</sup> For Kohut, the essence of the curative process is the contact with a mature selfobject (i.e., the analyst) and the analysand's gradual acquisition of soothing, stabilizing, and self-esteem-maintaining selfobject functions. It is ironic that in Kohut's model the ego-ideal is that of the psychoanalyst because there is no guarantee that the Kohutian analyst's ego is less neurotic than the analysand's ego. And even if the

---

<sup>88</sup> Heinz Kohut and Ernest S. Wolf, "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 59 (1978): 417-418; Heinz Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self* (New York: International Universities Press, 1977), 104-105.

<sup>89</sup> Heinz Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?* ed. Arnold Goldberg, with the collaboration of Paul Stephansky (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 65-66.

psychoanalyst were perfect, he or she still could only serve as a partial object to the analysand because no psychoanalyst can fulfill or adequately represent desire of another human being. The fulfillment found in the self psychologist's consolation only works on the imaginary level, and, therefore, must remain a fantasy.

"Self psychology," Kohut argues, "does not find the essence of the curative process in the cognitive sphere per se."<sup>90</sup> In other words, self psychology, which seeks for a change at the behavioral level, only operates in the realm of imagination. The key means of restoring the self-selfobject matrix are the analyst's empathy and his or her countertransference which can be therapeutically useful. "It is by virtue of such controlled self-object countertransferences that empathic data, i.e., data obtained by vicarious introspection, become available to the analyst."<sup>91</sup> It is this "introspection" Lacan would later object to.

Despite the flaws of self psychology, many literary critics believe that the principles of transference, countertransference, and empathy, which are stressed by Kohut, can be of importance to the reading process. Gail S. Reed, for example, argues that "the text evokes an

---

<sup>90</sup> Kohut, *How Does Analysis Cure?*, 64.

<sup>91</sup> Ernest S. Wolf, "Transferences and Countertransferences in the Analysis of Disorders of the Self," *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 15 (1979): 586.



unconscious fantasy in the reader; critics who respond to the text empathically but without conscious understanding re-enact aspects of that organizing fantasy in the way they write their criticism."<sup>92</sup> According to Jonathan D. Culler, reading can be viewed as "a displaced repetition of the structure it seeks to analyze."<sup>93</sup> Readers may project their own needs and defenses onto texts and use the text to replicate their own identities; "identity re-creates itself," Norman Holland claims.<sup>94</sup>

Many critics, including J. Brooks Bouson, believe, with Heinz Kohut, "that empathy is central to the reading experience."<sup>95</sup> Ironically enough, the reader's feelings, such as empathy, seem to indicate a similar lack of scientific objectivity that Kohut's followers criticize in psychoanalysis. For those critics, to insist on a "scientific" treatment of texts reveals a tendency to shy away from the subjective feelings that arise during the reading process, i.e., the identification with such literary texts. At any rate, I will leave this sort of criticism

---

<sup>92</sup> Gail S. Reed, "Toward a Methodology for Applying Psychoanalysis to Literature," *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 51 (1982): 39.

<sup>93</sup> Jonathan D. Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 271.

<sup>94</sup> Norman N. Holland, "Unity Identity Test Self," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 90 (1975): 817.

<sup>95</sup> Bouson, 26.

pertaining to the reader and focus on psychoanalytic literary criticism pertaining to the structures of texts.

While Kohut, Lasch, and others view narcissistic tendencies as the predominant psychological disorder of our time particularly, it is also possible to follow the notion which has been made by Layton and Schapiro, namely that narcissistic symptoms "existed before and were simply not 'heard' by the analyst."<sup>96</sup> Freud, for instance, when he wrote "On Narcissism," believed that narcissism existed before the twentieth century--and so did Lacan who focuses on the structure of the human subject.

#### **JACQUES LACAN**

The French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) broke with the schools of ego and self psychology (Anna Freud, Kohut, Kernberg) because he perceived their emphasis on the development of the ego functions as a threat to the integrity of Freud's discovery of the unconscious. Lacan further found that school's aim of strengthening the ego's defenses against those instinctual impulses as fundamentally wrong and at odds with reality.<sup>97</sup> Lacan thought that any emphasis on the "consciousness" or "reality" only betrays the importance of the unconscious. Any psychoanalytic cure

---

<sup>96</sup> Layton and Schapiro, 1; cf. Kohut, *The Restoration of the Self*, 291.

<sup>97</sup> Jonathan Scott Lee, *Jacques Lacan* (1990; reprint, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 20.

which only operates at the consciousness level would no longer deserve the name "psychoanalytic" because such an approach basically eliminates the unconscious. As soon as the unconscious is left aside, any curative process happens only at the surface level. The ideal of mastery of one's feelings, which is characteristic of Stoicism, is merely a behavioral adjustment which controls passionate or aggressive feelings of the human subject. One may adapt to the norms of society and still feel very much alienated. The recognition of one's alienation is the key to personal growth; one wants to know about the structure of the human subject in order not to suffer. This is, as Lacan says, "the point where the real journey begins."<sup>98</sup>

Self psychology would no longer encourage an understanding of the human structure but merely an adaptation to somebody else. As observed above, self psychology promotes the adaptation of the analysand's ego to that of the analyst. Lacan, in contrast, emphasizes the perception of the world as constructed by language. According to Lacan, "[t]he ideal of analysis is not to complete self mastery, the absence of passion. It is to render the subject capable of sustaining the analytic dialogue, to speak neither too early, nor too late," in other words, to help the patient recognize one's identity as

---

<sup>98</sup> E, 7.

alienated or structurally and forever incomplete--and to treat the symptom that makes one suffer.<sup>99</sup> As observed above, some degree of incompleteness will always prevail because language, which is based on signifiers that cannot capture all aspects of the unconscious, informs the human existence. One wants to know as much as possible in order not to suffer--a feasible goal according to the Delphic oracle--but because it is the nature of the unconscious to remain mysterious to a certain degree, one will never know oneself fully; hence, absolutely full self-knowledge has to remain illusory, and, therefore, is not desirable. Lacan's theory of the coming-into-being, which promotes impermanent systems of "paranoic knowledge," opposes any theory deriving from self psychology.<sup>100</sup>

Lacan argues that in psychoanalysis the supreme good is the "Mother," i.e., the parent of the other sex--a good that is forbidden.<sup>101</sup> As long as mankind is longing for this supreme good and the realization of its unconscious desire, the human subject does not possess absolute freedom. A

---

<sup>99</sup> *S* 1: 3.

<sup>100</sup> *E*, 17.

<sup>101</sup> On the supreme good see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis, 1959-1960*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Dennis Porter (New York: W. W. Norton: 1992); originally published as *Le Séminaire VII* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986) (hereafter abbreviated as *S*).

"personality that realizes itself only in suicide"<sup>102</sup>--with the mythical Narcissus figure very well being a subject displaying such deadly narcissistic behavior--may feel autonomous while committing suicide but of course this kind of paradoxical autonomy is very misleading. There is not any sort of autonomy after--or before--the moment the suicide has been realized. There is no real hope for the human subject for a change of his or her plight.

As the narrator in *Moby-Dick* puts it: "[T]hat mortal man who has more of joy than sorrow in him, that mortal man cannot be true--not true, or undeveloped. With books the same. The truest of all men was the Man of Sorrows, and the truest of all books is Solomon's, and the Ecclesiastes is the fine hammered steel of woe. 'All is vanity.' ALL."<sup>103</sup> Asked what people could hope for, Lacan replied that it is up to every human subject to "hope for whatever you want [but] . . . hope won't change anything, which makes it futile. . . . Psychoanalysis would allow you, of course, the hope of refining and clarifying the unconscious of which you're the subject. But everyone knows that I don't

---

<sup>102</sup> E, 6.

<sup>103</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick: or, The Whale*, ed. Harrison Hayford et al., vol. 6 of *The Writings of Herman Melville* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988) (hereafter abbreviated as *Moby-Dick*), 424.

encourage anyone into it, anyone whose desire is not resolute."<sup>104</sup>

Lacan's approach towards psychoanalysis has been described as a rigorous re-reading of Freud's work through the eyes of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), keeping Freud's central concept of the unconscious but taking a structural approach, and eliminating all the contradictory nineteenth century biologisms. In "The direction of the treatment and the principles of its power" (1958), Lacan argues that any psychoanalytic interpretation is based on the fact that "the unconscious is structured in the most radical way like a language, that a material operates in it according to certain laws, which are the same laws as those discovered in the study of actual languages that are or were spoken."<sup>105</sup> As Lacan explained in "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason since Freud" (1957), Freud's unconscious, structured like a language, is not composed of signs—stable meanings but of signifiers or signifying chains, and can be reduced to the mechanisms of the literary tropes metaphor and metonymy.<sup>106</sup> In other words, Lacan's assumption that the unconscious is structured like a language refers to the recognition that

---

<sup>104</sup> Lacan, *Television*, 43-44.

<sup>105</sup> *E*, 234.

<sup>106</sup> *E*, 156-159.

signifiers, as used in common language, can never fully grasp the unconscious sphere, just as words can never fully capture the meaning of things. For Lacan, language is not just a representation of thinking but its origin. According to Francoise Meltzer, Lacan's impact on literary theory cannot be underestimated.<sup>107</sup>

For the remainder of this chapter, I will outline Lacan's understanding of Freud's psychoanalytic principles, and the ways in which his findings affect the study of narcissism. Since the early 1950's until close to his death, Jacques Lacan spread his ideas through a total of 27 weekly or biweekly seminars, of which most were later published by the French psychoanalyst and his students. In *Seminar 1* (1953-1954), in which Lacan dealt with Freud's papers on technique, he devoted a few talks to the topic of the imaginary. In two of Lacan's conversations with his students, the French teacher lectured "On Narcissism" (chapter 9) and on "The Two Narcissisms" (chapter 10). Since the imaginary itself is, according to Lacan, a subject "quite enough to fill up several years of teaching,"<sup>108</sup> I will discuss the grand terms "imaginary," "symbolic," and

---

<sup>107</sup> Francoise Meltzer, "Unconscious," in *Critical Terms for Literary Study*, ed. Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 161.

<sup>108</sup> S 1: 73.

"real" only to the extent they help us understand the narcissistic structure.

After having brought up the notion of transference at the outset of his lecture "On Narcissism" in chapter 9 of *Seminar 1*, Lacan admits some resistance concerning the connection between the bonds of transference and the characteristics of the love relation.<sup>109</sup> According to Lacan, "it is possible that the completion of the theory, and even its progress, are experienced by large groups of society as a threat."<sup>110</sup> Lacan concedes that his approach "has its limits, like any dogmatic account" but he attempts "to locate [. . .] the structure which articulates the narcissistic relation, the function of love in its widest sense and the transference in its practical efficacy" by providing a critical textual commentary of Freud's 1914 introduction to narcissism.<sup>111</sup>

Central to Freud's understanding of narcissism is the notion of libido which, in his belief, first appears as "primitive auto-erotism" and then as "(secondary) narcissism." According to Lacan, one reason why Freud distinguished egoistical libido and sexual libido is to avoid a neutralization of the libido as Jung had suggested

---

<sup>109</sup> S 1: 110.

<sup>110</sup> S 1: 111.

<sup>111</sup> S 1: 112-113.



earlier. But Freud's conception of a primordial auto-erotism directed at one's *Innenwelt* gradually developing into secondary narcissism directed at the *Umwelt* is almost equivalent to Jung's theory and creates problems.<sup>112</sup> Lacan criticizes Freud's bipolar conception with the libidinal subject on the one side, and the world on the other--and addresses the issue of the two narcissisms a few pages later in an entire chapter (10).<sup>113</sup> Arguing that libido has nothing to do with instinctual registers and thus stripping it from its contradictory nineteenth century biologism, Lacan understands libido as a linguistic entity linked to an entire range of functions--and grounded in language.

In "The Two Narcissisms," Lacan argues that the distinction between ego drives (*Ichtriebe*) and sexual drives (*Sexuallibido/Libidotriebe*) lacks clarity--so that even Freud later called it "our mythology."<sup>114</sup> In regards to the notion of drive, Lacan further explains that "the basic mainspring determining the setting into motion of the gigantic sexual mechanism" is "an image."<sup>115</sup> This image appears in the guise of a transitory phenotype (*Gestalt*), as Lacan elaborates:

---

<sup>112</sup> S 1: 114.

<sup>113</sup> S 1: 113.

<sup>114</sup> S 1: 120.

<sup>115</sup> S 1: 121.

The mechanical throwing into gear of the sexual instinct is thus essentially crystallised in a relation of images, in . . . an imaginary relation.

This is the framework within which we must articulate the *Libidotriebe* and the *Ichtriebe*.

The libidinal drive is centred on the function of the imaginary.

In other words, the sexual behavior of the human subject is "prone to the lure."<sup>116</sup> Before Lacan continues to discuss the relations of the libido with the imaginary (I) and the real (R), and the function of the ego in the psychic economy, one of Lacan's students attempts a preliminary definition of the two narcissisms. According to O. Mannoni, the first kind resembles a "libido which intra-physically invests the ontological ego," and the second kind resembles "an object-libido which invests something which may perhaps be the ego-ideal, and is in any case an image of the ego."<sup>117</sup>

The first of the functions which Lacan mentions in connection with narcissism is the imaginary register (I). Advertising the usefulness of his mirror-stage essay, Lacan proclaims "that the human ego is founded on the basis of the imaginary relation."<sup>118</sup> At a specific point in the development of the human subject, when he or she identifies

---

<sup>116</sup> S 1: 123.

<sup>117</sup> S 1: 122.

<sup>118</sup> S 1: 115.

with an *Urbild*, the ego (*moi*) begins to take on its function. According to Lacan, the imaginary origin of the ego's function gives form to the human subject's narcissism. In other words, as soon as the human subject's ego is involved, we encounter an imaginary or narcissistic identification or relation.

In connection with his lectures on narcissism, Lacan spells out what use can be made of his conception of the mirror-stage for a better understanding of narcissism. By clearly defining the imaginary register, Lacan supports Freud in his "defending the originality of the psychoanalytic dynamic against the Jungian dissolution of the problem."<sup>119</sup> While Jung blurs the distinction between neuroses and psychoses by neutralizing libido, Lacan makes sense of Freud's thinking by pointing out the different functions within the human subject, with the imaginary being one of them.

According to Lacan, Freud had noted that the neurotic subject takes a recourse to fancy in the imaginary register whereas the psychotic subject, if he or she loses the realization of the real, does not find any imaginary substitute.<sup>120</sup> "*Imaginary* here refers--in the first instance, to the subject's relation to its formative

---

<sup>119</sup> S 1: 115.

<sup>120</sup> S 1: 116.

identifications, which is the true meaning of the term 'image' in analysis--secondly, to the relation of the subject to the real whose characteristic is that of being illusory, which is the facet of the imaginary most often highlighted," Lacan adds.<sup>121</sup> Towards the end of his lecture "On narcissism," the French analyst hints that the relations between the imaginary and the symbolic are distinguished in terms of language.

Lacan's basic essay on the imaginary field, entitled "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" (1949), is a revised version of his 1936 paper on "The Looking-glass Phase." Even though his 1949 essay, commonly known as "The Mirror Stage," focuses on the stages of children's development between six and eighteen months, Lacan analyzes the mirror-stage in the light of adult behavior. As with Freud's phases of the human development, Lacan's development of the human subject during the mirror stage, which can be outlined in five stages, is by no means linear:

(1) The neo-natal months are characterized by "signs of uneasiness and motor unco-ordination." Lacan calls the lack of bodily integrity "real *specific prematurity of birth in man.*"<sup>122</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> S 1: 116.

<sup>122</sup> E, 4.

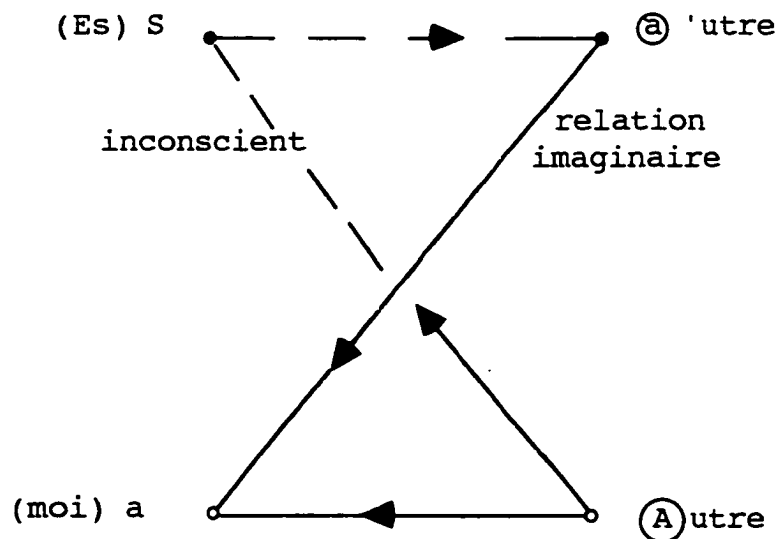
(2) The child's recognition of its mirror image can take place from the age of six months, when it still is incapable of effectively controlling its body movements, up to the age of eighteen months. However, the mirror stage marks the child's assumption of a specular image, and because the child identifies with this image, it is "jubilant."<sup>123</sup> The child's recognition of its mirror image may leave some people wondering how human beings developed before the invention of the mirror or in cultures which forbid its use. In the Lacanian model, however, it does not make a difference whether the child sees itself in the mirror or not. All that matters is the child's imaginary identification--which can happen to be the identification with its mirror image or with any other object that represents a whole, for instance, a parent or a brother or sister.

(3) The child's identification, i.e., the transformation that takes place in the child when it assumes an image, and the jubilant affirmation of bodily unity in the image are superseded by the recognition of a discrepancy between the "orthopaedic" totality of the body-image and the continuing fragmentary character of the child's body movements. The child is taking itself to be something other than itself; it assumes the armor of an alienating identity at the imaginary

---

<sup>123</sup> E, 2.

level (I), unable to realize its desire in the sphere of the Real (R): "[T]o break out of the circle of the *Innenwelt* into the *Umwelt* generates the inexhaustible quadrature of the ego's verifications."<sup>124</sup> This statement refers to Lacan's Schéma L.



The "quadrature" of the ego refers to the four corners of Lacan's Schéma L, which he introduced as early as February 2, 1955 in his Seminar Two,<sup>125</sup> and over which the human subject is stretched: "namely, S, his ineffable, stupid existence, o, his objects, o', his ego, that is, that which is reflected of his form in his objects, and O, the locus

---

<sup>124</sup> E, 4.

<sup>125</sup> S, 2: 109.

from which the question of his existence may be presented to him."<sup>126</sup>

In describing this schema, which signifies that the condition of the human subject S is dependent on what is being unfolded in the Other O, Lacan would also use three registers:

1. R = the Real
2. S = the Symbolic
3. I = the Imaginary

In the Schéma L, the exigency called Autre (A), Freud's superego, corresponds with Lacan's Symbolic (S)--which is also known as the law or language, the Other with the capitalized O. The human subject is dependent on what is being unfolded in the Autre (A)/Other (O); Lacan says, "the unconscious is the discourse of the Other."<sup>127</sup> In other words, language and cultural norms, the Other (O), influence both the ego (*moi*) and the unconscious (Es) of the human subject, as the two arrows in the schema indicate which point from the Other to the ego and the unconscious. The *symbolic* castration of the human subject thus originates in the field of the Symbolic (S). No human subject is

---

<sup>126</sup> E, 194. In this citation the English terms o(ther) and O(ther) correspond with the original French terms a(utre) and A(utre) respectively, which appears in the Schéma L.

<sup>127</sup> E, 193.

literally castrated, the incest prohibition serves as a metaphor for the law of signification.

Likewise, Lacan's incestuous desire for the phallic Mother has to be understood as a *symbolic* desire for wholeness and completion which a priori can never be achieved. This incestuous desire originates in Lacan's realm of the Real (R), which incorporates everything that exists but cannot be expressed fully or formulated, everything that is "*inconscient*." Because the incestuous desire cannot be fulfilled, the human subject will displace the incestuously desired object with another object in the realm of the Imaginary (I).

The Imaginary (I) corresponds with the set of projections and identifications called *moi* (ego) in Lacan's schema L. It is along the axis between the *moi* (a)/ego (o) and its objects, including the mirror image (a')/(o') where the narcissistic identification takes place in a "*relation imaginaire*." Freud's ego has been split into two separate exigencies: the ego (a/o) and its mirror image (a'/o'). In an identification, one may assume that "I am like her," in a projection, one may assume that "She likes me." For that reason, the categories of the ego (a/o) and the mirror image (a'/o') are interchangeable along the axis of this imaginary order. The *autre* (a'), Narcissus's parents or Narcissus's image of himself, for example, is the dimension of fiction which is commonly called "reality" which has nothing to do



with Lacan's category of "the Real." The child's or Narcissus's *moi* (a)/ego (o) narcissistically identifies with the mirror image (a'), mistaking it for "reality."

Since the image which the child comes to love is only a partial representation of his or her unspecified desire, alienation arises, and everlasting doubts about identity haunt the human being throughout life. Humankind's desire, which serves as a metaphor to become whole, as expressed in Plato's myth, will always be disappointed. As a result, the growing child experiences the primordial law of incest prohibition, where culture begins in opposition to nature, as alienation. In societies which subscribe to the incest prohibition, i.e., all societies, people's incestuous desire has to be rejected, and thus everybody is somewhat neurotic.<sup>128</sup> In *Seminar 7* on the ethics of psychoanalysis, Lacan formulated it in the following way:

[Ethics] begins at the moment when the subject poses the question of that good he had unconsciously sought in the social structures. And it is at that moment, too, that he is led to discover the deep relationship as a result of which that which presents itself as a law is closely tied to the very structure of desire. If he doesn't discover right away the final desire that Freudian inquiry has discovered as the desire of incest, he discovers that which articulates his conduct so that the object of his desire is always maintained

---

<sup>128</sup> On the original function of incest prohibition see Lévi-Strauss, 2: 19-24.

at a certain distance. But this distance is not complete.<sup>129</sup>

In other words, no matter how close one may come to the parent of the other sex, the distance to this parent, which may be called proximity, can never be overcome.

(4) The identification with the *imago* of the other shapes the identity of the child in an enduring way. Because the child identifies with the other (a signifier, an image), in relationships with other people (father, mother, siblings), the child's identity is linked "to socially elaborate situations."<sup>130</sup> As soon as the baby is born, the imposition of the law or subjectification, which has already been part of the unconscious, takes place when the parents give the child its name and assign it its role in the family. The child's social identity is immediately determined through language. The Other (the law structured as language) is always already there.

(5) At about two years of age, the formation of the *I*, i.e., from a specular *I* into a social *I*, is consolidated with the child's acquisition of language. There is no pre-linguistic condition for humans. With the acquisition of language, the child's essentially imaginary identity, rooted in the mirror

---

<sup>129</sup> S 7: 76.

<sup>130</sup> E, 5.

stage and developed through the identification with others, once more becomes subjected to the symbolic order.

In connection with Lacan's mirror stage and imaginary identification, another essay regarding the narcissistic structure is of importance. In "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis" (1948), Lacan argues that "Aggressivity is the correlative tendency of a mode of identification that we call narcissistic, and which determines the formal structure of man's ego [*moi*] and of the register of entities characteristic of his world."<sup>131</sup> Lacan came to make this claim when he noticed the reappearance of aggressive images of the fragmented body (castration, mutilation, etc.) in the transference relation between analysand and analyst.<sup>132</sup> During analysis, the subject's aggressivity towards the analyst forms a negative imaginary transference, and the patient's aggressive intentions actually intensify the relation between analyst and analysand and thus support the analytic process.<sup>133</sup> Referring to Freud's 1925 essay "Die Verneinung [Negation],"<sup>134</sup> Lacan further insists that during analysis reactions of opposition, negation, ostentation, and lying are the characteristic modes of agency of the ego, and

---

<sup>131</sup> *E*, 16.

<sup>132</sup> *E*, 11.

<sup>133</sup> *E*, 14.

<sup>134</sup> *GW* 14: 11-15/*SE* 19: 235-239.

that the nucleus given to consciousness, which we call ego, structures the human subject in a way that he or she fails to recognize (*méconnaissance*).<sup>135</sup> For the ego's actual character remains illusory as long as the human subject denies its unfulfilled desire.

To explain his thesis on narcissistic identification and aggressivity in man, the French analyst refers to Freud's definition of the relation between the ego and the image of its ideal: "*Die Entwicklung des Ichs besteht in einer Entfernung vom primären Narzißmus und erzeugt ein intensives Streben, diesen wieder zu gewinnen. Diese Entfernung geschieht vermittels der Libidoverschiebung auf ein von außen aufgenötigtes Ichideal, die Befriedigung durch die Erfüllung dieses Ideals* [The development of the ego consists in a departure from primary narcissism and gives rise to a vigorous attempt to recover that state. This departure is brought about by means of the displacement of libido onto an ego ideal imposed from without; and satisfaction is brought about from fulfilling this ideal]."<sup>136</sup> The fulfillment of this ideal can lead to either homicide (Oedipus) or suicide (Narcissus).

At the height of alienation, the image devours everything else and absorbs one's identity, for example,

---

<sup>135</sup> E, 15.

<sup>136</sup> GW 10: 167-168/SE 14: 100.

Narcissus's mirror image absorbs Narcissus's identity, the image of Moby Dick absorbs Ahab's identity, and the image of Tadzio absorbs Aschenbach's identity--as I will demonstrate in the following three chapters. Lacan then observes: "It is in this erotic relation, in which the human individual fixes upon himself an image that alienates him from himself, that are to be found the [libidinal] energy and the [narcissistic] form [of identification] on which this organization of the passions that he will call his ego is based."<sup>137</sup>

Commenting on the relation between the ego and the image of its ideal and on Lacan's claim that human identity is itself mediated by the images of others, Jonathan Scott Lee cites Arthur Rimbaud in a letter of May 13, 1871 to Georges Izambard: "*C'est faux de dire: Je pense. On devrait dire: On me pense. Pardon du jeu de mots. Je est un autre* [It is false to say: I think. One ought to say: People think me. Pardon the pun. I is an other]."<sup>138</sup> Lee concludes that "much of Lacan's work is an elaboration of this passage from Rimbaud."<sup>139</sup> While Lacan's work is very much rooted in the notion of the "I is an other," the very

---

<sup>137</sup> E, 19.

<sup>138</sup> Arthur Rimbaud, *Complete Works, Selected Letters*, trans. Wallace Fowlie (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 302-305.

<sup>139</sup> Lee, 26 and 206 note 29.

relationship between the "ego" and the "other" informs the structure of the myth of Narcissus; the relation between the "ego" and the "other" forms a quintessential part of the narcissistic structure.

"It is this captation of the *imago* of the human form," Lacan explains, "which, between the ages of six months and two and a half years, dominates the entire dialectic of the child's behaviour."<sup>140</sup> On the one hand, there is the disturbing realization of the gap between the child's fragmented bodily experience and its narcissistic identification with the unity of the visual reflection--which eventually will be mastered; on the other hand, however, is the ever so frustrating realization of the gap between the child's narcissistic desire for the parent of the other sex and the incest taboo--which is never going to be bridged, and thus leads to a normal aggressive transitivity. Apart from aggressive behavior caused by "the subject's internal conflict tension," the child finds itself in "aggressive competitiveness" with others, e.g., the father, for the object, e.g., the mother, desired by the child and the other. Since "man's ego can never be reduced to his experienced identity," the inexperienced levels of

---

<sup>140</sup> E, 19.

the ego determine the characteristic of certain personalities.<sup>141</sup>

In section two of "The Two Narcissisms," Lacan introduces the schema with two mirrors, one concave and one plane mirror, and points out that this model follows Freud's ideas spelled out in *Die Traumdeutung* and *Abriss* "that the fundamental psychic agencies should be primarily conceived of as representing what takes place in a camera."<sup>142</sup> Returning to Mannoni's comment on the two narcissisms, Lacan notes that a human subject is not an eye--but this model of two mirrors can be applied because we are in the field of the imaginary (I).<sup>143</sup> Lacan finds himself in agreement with Mannoni that there is an initial narcissism "connected with the corporeal image."<sup>144</sup> This narcissism gives the human subject its *Umwelt* and makes possible the organization of totality. But man differs from animals in a second narcissism concerning "the relation to the other."<sup>145</sup> For man, this other has a captivating value, on account of the

---

<sup>141</sup> *E*, 20. Lacan claims in "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," 423 that "the narcissistic relation to a fellow being is the fundamental experience in the development of the imaginary sphere in human beings."

<sup>142</sup> *S* 1: 123.

<sup>143</sup> *S* 1: 124.

<sup>144</sup> *S* 1: 125.

<sup>145</sup> *S* 1: 125.

anticipation that it is represented as a unitary image. The other or alter ego, Lacan continues, "is more or less confused . . . with [Freud's] *Ichideal*."<sup>146</sup> According to Lacan, "there is a genuine perversion of reality through the fascination with the loved object and its overestimation," and the loved object is--through its captative effect on the human subject--equivalent to the *Ichideal*.<sup>147</sup>

Narcissistic identification, then, or narcissism of the second kind, is a form of "identification with the other."<sup>148</sup> "The subject sees his [libidinal] being in a reflection in relation to the other, that is to say in relation to the *Ichideal*."<sup>149</sup> Lacan concludes his account by pointing out that in the structuration of reality the ego has to undergo a fundamental alienation constituted by the reflected image of the human subject, which is the *Urich*, the original form of the *Ichideal* as well as that of the relation to the other.

The next three chapters will explore the links that may be made between the narcissistic structure of the human subject and its manifestation in literary works--before and after psychoanalysis came into being. Before carrying out

---

<sup>146</sup> S 1: 125.

<sup>147</sup> S 1: 126.

<sup>148</sup> S 1: 125.

<sup>149</sup> S 1: 126.



such a comparative analysis, however, I will briefly summarize the theoretical paradigm, which will be the backdrop for the remainder of this study. The narcissistic structure, illustrated in Lacan's Schéma L, consists of four fundamental elements:

1. the incest prohibition in the field of the Symbolic (S)
2. the incestuous desire for the phallic Mother in the field of the Real (R) as a result of this prohibition
3. the displacement of this desire for another imaginary object in the field of the Imaginary (I)
4. the obsessive quest of that image as the symptom ( $\Sigma$ ) that holds the three previous fields together

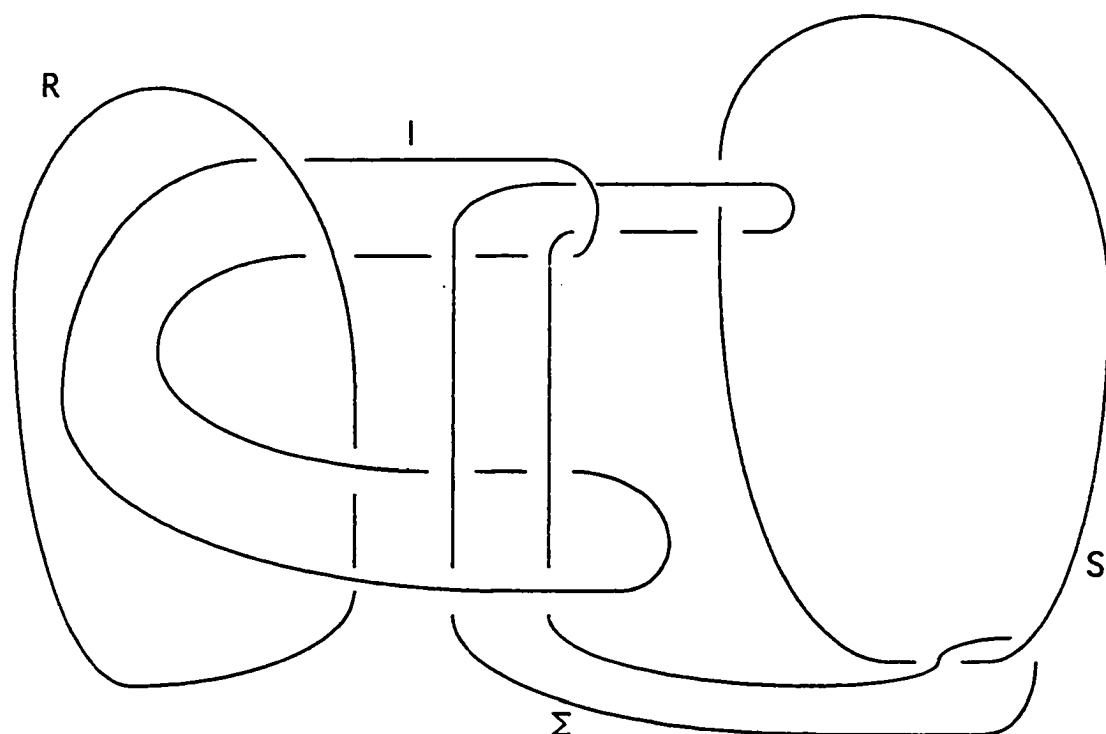
Having noticed the deficiencies of the geometric, bidimensional Schéma L, Lacan developed a topology in 1976 which is a *real* notation of the human psyche.<sup>150</sup> "It is clear that the three exigencies are bound only by a hole in their center: the void is therefore the possibility of linkage itself, repeating in each exigency the lack of the master signifier, the phallus," Alexandre Leupin notes.<sup>151</sup> Lacan's achievement is not so much the renaming of Freud's

---

<sup>150</sup> Jacques Lacan, "Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines," *Scilicet* 6-7 (1976): 39. The error in Lacan's graphic, regarding the points of intersection between the I-string and the  $\Sigma$ -string at the lower loop, can be emended by having both ends of the  $\Sigma$ -string first go underneath the lower loop of the I-string and then cross the I-string above it.

<sup>151</sup> Alexandre Leupin, "Introduction: Voids and Knots in Knowledge and Truth," in Leupin, 15.

exigencies "Id," "Superego," and "Ego" to "Real," "Symbolic," and "Imaginary" but the way in which he relates them. Lacan insisted that this last topology of his "is not imaginary; contrary to the one of triangles [Schéma L], it is real; it is knots of strings."<sup>152</sup>




---

<sup>152</sup> Lacan, "Conférences," 56.

### III. THE NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

#### THE NARCISSUS THEME IN CLASSICAL LITERATURE

When one considers the term narcissism, it is obvious that this phenomenon is associated with the ancient myth and that the name derives from the mythical figure of Narcissus. The Roman poet Publius Ovidius Naso (43 B.C.—A.D. 17/18) shaped the myth of Narcissus so fundamentally that his version of the myth has become the most influential one in literary history. Any comparison and contrast of this myth within the field of literature must take note of Ovid. Ovid's version of the story of Narcissus and Echo, which can be found in *Metamorphoses* 3.339-510, is the key passage upon which my understanding of the myth of Narcissus is based because it is, as Louise Vinge says, "the only narrative version from classical antiquity which has a complete and detailed artistic form".<sup>1</sup>

Since Ovid's account of the myth has become the most popular one, people often think that Ovid's version makes up the one and only version of the myth of Narcissus. While the goal of this study cannot be to re-evaluate the intricacies of the *Quellenforschung* (the study of the sources), one has to be at least aware of the fact that, when referring to the myth of Narcissus, various versions of

---

<sup>1</sup> Vinge, 19.

the same myth have been transmitted. In Lacanian terms, all the variants of the myth of Narcissus may be treated as singular cases, as instances of and simultaneously as exceptions to the overall law, namely the Narcissus theme. In the following section, I will furnish a brief summary of the Greek origins of the myth, its variants, and its development prior to Ovid in order to introduce the reader to the plot structure of the myth of Narcissus.

### THE MYTH OF NARCISSUS PRIOR TO OVID

"There are no extant accounts of Narcissus from the Archaic, Classical, or Hellenistic period. Almost all the mentions of Narcissus have their source in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*," Clayton Zimmerman notes.<sup>2</sup> Although the origins of the myth can be traced back to Greek poetry, Ovid's version is so dominant in literary history that most of the Greek sources disappeared. The majority of the literary sources stem from the first century A.D.--which

---

<sup>2</sup> Clayton Zimmerman, *The Pastoral Narcissus: A Study of the First Idyll of Theocritus* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994), 2; chapter one "Tracing the Narcissus Myth" provides the first full study of the sources since Friedrich Wieseler, *Narkissos. Eine kunstmythologische Abhandlung nebst einem Anhang über die Narcissen und ihre Beziehung im Leben, Mythos und Cultus der Griechen* (Göttingen: Dieterich, 1856). Also see Wilhelm Greve, "Narkissos," in *Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*, ed. W. H. Roscher, 7 vols. (1884-1937; 2nd reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1978) (hereafter abbreviated as Roscher) 3.1 (1897-1902): 10-21, here 12; Bömer, 1 (1969): 536-570; here 537.

makes an evaluation of Ovid's originality extremely difficult.<sup>3</sup>

Friedrich Wieseler's monograph *Narkissos* (1856) is "[t]he first account of the occurrence, form and significance of the myth in classical antiquity carried out in an objective, scholarly manner."<sup>4</sup> Wieseler's dated but still relevant study presents all the known literary passages from antiquity and then discusses at length all the possible artistic representations of the Narcissus story. In a rather naive way, Wieseler believes that the myth of Narcissus has its origin in botanical observations and belongs to a group of transformation myths which deal with flowers and trees.<sup>5</sup> The flower called narcissus was indeed well known for its medical effect of causing drowsiness:

Narcissi duo genera in usum medici recipiunt, purpureo flore et alterum herbaceum, hunc stomacho inutilem et ideo vomitorium alvosque solventem, nervis inimicum, caput gravantem et a narce narcisum dictum, non a fabuloso puero. utriusque radix mulsei saporis est.

---

<sup>3</sup> Samson Eitrem, "Narkissos," in *Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, 24 vols., ed. Georg Wissowa et al. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894-1963) (hereafter abbreviated as *RE*) 16 (1935): 1721-1733, here 1721-1724.

<sup>4</sup> Vinge, 1 referring to Wieseler.

<sup>5</sup> Eitrem, in *RE* 16 (1935): 1726.

Of the narcissus there are two kinds used by physicians: one with a [purple]<sup>6</sup> flower and the other with grass-green leaves. The latter is injurious to the stomach, so that it acts as an emetic and as a purge; it is bad for the sinews and causes a dull headache, its name being derived from the word narce, torpor, and not from the youth in the myth. The root of each variety has the taste of honey wine.<sup>7</sup>

The narcissus flower, which was described by Pliny the Elder a little earlier in his *Natural History* at 21.25, undoubtedly preceded the literary figure:

Sunt et purpurea lilia, aliquando gemino caule, carnosiore tantum radice maiorisque bulbi, sed unius; narcissum vocant. huius alterum genus flore candido, calice purpureo. differentia a liliis est et haec, quod narcissis in radice folia sunt, probatissimis in Lyciae montibus. tertio generi cetera eadem, caeliox herbaceus. omnes serotini, post arcturum enim florent ac per aequinoctium autumnum.

There is also a bright-red lily, having sometimes a double stem, and differing from other lilies only in having a fleshier root and a larger bulb, and that undivided. It is called the narcissus. Another variety of it has a white flower and a reddish bud. There is this further difference between the ordinary lily and the narcissus, that the leaves of the latter grow straight out of the root. The most popular sort is found on the mountains of Lycia. A third kind has all its characteristics the same as those of the other kinds, except that the cup is light green. All the

---

<sup>6</sup> See Robert J. Edgeworth, *The Colors of the Aeneid* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992), 150-154 and 215-222 on the translation of *purpureo*.

<sup>7</sup> Pliny, *C. Plinius Secundus Naturalis Historia*, ed. L. Ian and C. Mayhoff, 7 vols. (1892; reprint, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967) (hereafter abbreviated as *Plin. Nat. Hist.*), here 21.128/*Pliny: Natural History*, trans. H. Rackham, 10 vols., vols. 6-8 trans. W. H. S. Jones (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938-1965) (hereafter abbreviated as *Jones*), 6 (1951): 255.

narcissi blossom late, for the flower comes after the rising of the autumnal equinox.<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of the possible connections between the narcissus flower and the literary figure, Ovid's sophisticated narrative of the myth of Narcissus is based "on a profound knowledge of certain common psychological facts," Otto Kiefer already noted in 1934.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, this study will focus on the psychoanalytic implications of Ovid's literary account.

When creating his version of the myth, Ovid must have used Hellenistic sources because some of his motifs can be found in works which predate him. According to sculptural evidence, the myth of Narcissus can also be dated back to the early Hellenistic period in the third century B.C. "The literary, artistic and cultic evidence all seem to indicate that Narcissus originated in a local Boeotian legend," Zimmerman says.<sup>10</sup>

Among those Greek accounts, which may be considered as the Greek origins of the myth and which bear some thematic relevance to the Narcissus myth, one finds Theocritus' story

---

<sup>8</sup> Plin. *Nat. Hist.* 21.25/Jones, 6: 179.

<sup>9</sup> Otto Kiefer, *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*, trans. Gilbert and Helen Highet (London: George Routledge, 1934; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1975), 239; originally published as *Kulturgeschichte Roms unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der römischen Sitten*.

<sup>10</sup> Zimmerman, 17-19, here 19.

of Hylas (Idyll 13).<sup>11</sup> When Hylas, Heracles' young lover, goes to a spring to fetch some water, nymphs who have fallen in love with him drag him down into the deep water. Another thematic similarity to the story of Narcissus can be found in Idyll 23 which features a cruel youth whose arrogant lack of empathy makes his suitor commit suicide. Ultimately, the cruel youth is killed himself when he jumps into water and a statue falls on him.<sup>12</sup> Significantly, "water plays a part in the youth's death, albeit in a much different fashion than in Ovid."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, death--recalling Freud's death drive and Lacan's Name-of-the-Father--mark an integral part of the narcissistic structure.<sup>14</sup> Two other relevant and common Greek motifs used by Ovid are the beautiful young man who is transformed into a flower (e.g., Hyacinthus, Adonis), and the unapproachable young man who rejects the love of

---

<sup>11</sup> Theocritus, *A Translation and Commentary*, ed. S. F. Gow, 2 vols., 2nd. ed. (1950; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 1: 96-101; abbreviated as Theocritus, Idyll 13.

<sup>12</sup> Theocritus, Idyll 23 in Gow, 1: 176-181.

<sup>13</sup> Zimmerman, 5-6, here 6.

<sup>14</sup> The law of the father, which also marks the incest prohibition, is a symbolic concept. In "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," 422, Jacques Lacan says: "[T]he father is the representative, the incarnation, of the symbolic function which concentrates in itself those things most essential in other cultural structures: namely the tranquil, or rather, symbolic, enjoyment, culturally determined and established, of the mother's love." Also see *E*, 199.



others (e.g., Hippolytus).<sup>15</sup> In the end, Zimmerman proposes, it may have been a local poet living in Boeotia, such as Corinna of Tanagra, who may have supplied the source for the later authors Conon and Ovid.<sup>16</sup>

While it may be impossible to reconstruct the primary source of Ovid's version of the Narcissus myth, it is worthwhile presenting some authors, whose accounts of the story of Narcissus may have had some direct or indirect influence on Ovid:

1. Ovid's contemporary Conon, whose work probably dates from the period between 36 B.C. and A.D. 17, composed a short tale of Narcissus.<sup>17</sup>

ἐν Θεσπείαι τῆς Βοιωτίας (ἔστι δ' ἡ πόλις οὐχ ἑκὰς τοῦ Ἑλικῶνος) παῖς ἔφην Νάρκισσος πάνυ καλὸς καὶ ὑπερόπτης Ἐρωτός τε καὶ ἐραστῶν. καὶ οἱ μὲν ἄλλοι τῶν ἐραστῶν ἐρῶντες ἀπηγόρευσαν, Ἀμεινίας δὲ πολὺς ἦν ἐπιμένων καὶ δεόμενος. ὥς δ' οὐ προσίετο, ἀλλὰ καὶ ξίφος προσέπεμψεν, ἑαυτὸν πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν Ναρκίσσου διαχειρίζεται. πολλὰ καθικετεύσας τιμωρόν οἱ γενέσθαι τὸν θεόν. ὁ δὲ Νάρκισσος ἰδὼν αὐτοῦ τὴν ὄψιν καὶ τὴν μορφήν ἐπὶ κρήνης ἰνδαλλομένην τῷ ὕδατι, καὶ μόνος καὶ πρῶτος ἑαυτοῦ γίνεται ἄτοπος ἐραστής. τέλος ἀμηχανῶν καὶ δίκαια πάσχειν οἴηθεις ἀνθ' ὧν Ἀμεινίου ἐξύβρισε τοὺς

---

<sup>15</sup> Bömer, 1 (1969): 537. Eitrem, in *RE* 16 (1935): 1726. Greve, in *Roscher* 3.1 (1897-1902): 15.

<sup>16</sup> Zimmerman, 19-21.

<sup>17</sup> Felix Jacoby, "Konon," in *RE* 11 (1922): 1335-1338; Bernd Manuwald, "Narcissus bei Konon und Ovid," *Hermes* 103 (1975): 349-372; Zimmerman, 2-6 limits his discussion to "center upon the basic story line and plot elements." Zimmerman oversimplifies things when concluding that Ovid presents "an extremely subtle and detailed narrative, but all the basic plot elements are essentially the same as those present in Conon" (p. 9). Conon has neither a seer Tiresias to introduce the narrative nor a nymph named Echo.

ἔρωτας. ἑαυτὸν διαχρᾶται. καὶ ἐξ ἐκείνου θεσπιεῖς πᾶλλον τιμᾶν καὶ γεραίρειν τὸν Ἔρωτα καὶ πρὸς ταῖς κοιναῖς θεροεῖαις καὶ ἰδίαι θυεῖν ἐγνώσαν. δοκοῦσι δ' οἱ ἐπιχώριοι τὸν ωάρκισσον τὸ ἀνθος ἐξ ἐκείνης πρῶτον τῆς γῆς ἀνασχεῖν, εἰς ἣν ἐχύθη τὸ τοῦ Ναρκίσσου αἷμα.

In Thespieae in Boeotia (the town is not far from Helicon) there lived a child, Narcissus, beautiful in every respect and scornful of Eros and suitors. While the other would-be lovers swore off their pursuit, Ameinias remained greatly desirous. When, however, Narcissus did not come forth, but rather threw out a sword, Ameinias slew himself before Narcissus' doors, pleading all the while for a god to arise as an avenger for him.

Narcissus, upon seeing his face and physique mirrored in the water of a spring, became both the first and only paradoxical lover of himself. Finally, being helpless and thinking that he suffered justly in return for his abuse of Ameinias' love, he destroyed himself.

And from that time, the Thespians have learned to make private sacrifices in addition to public ones. The natives of this area believe that the narcissus flower first grew from that earth onto which the blood of Narcissus flowed.<sup>18</sup>

Conon's and Ovid's versions share the same geographical location and several motifs, such as the frustrated passion or Narcissus' beauty and haughtiness. However, Conon's story is based on homosexual love only, and other differences include the demonstration of Eros' power and the two bloody suicides of Ameinias and Narcissus. The graphic display of violence in this version is characteristic of the very early times in Greek literature--as opposed to Ovid's time, when Narcissus' suicide is presented in a disguised

---

<sup>18</sup> Felix Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker (FGrHist)*, 3 parts (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1926-), 1 A (1957): 197-198; abbreviated as Conon frag. 24 Jacoby/Translation by Zimmerman, 3-4.

form. Ovid's Narcissus succumbs and acquiesces in his fate when passing away. Both texts share the suicidal aspect of the human subject who cannot obtain the beloved image.

For Conon, the story is originally an etiologic tale, i.e., assigning a cause to it and cautioning against self-absorption and the display of arrogance in the worship of Eros. While scholars have not yet settled the question whether Ovid drew upon Conon or vice versa, it seems unlikely that Conon would base his story on Ovid but plausible that Ovid may have transformed Conon's version of the story.<sup>19</sup>

2. Pausanias (second century A.D.) presents two different Greek versions of the Narcissus myth in his book on Boeotia (9.31.7-9) which must have sources prior to Ovid's account. Pausanias regards the first version, which presents a very brief account of the reflection episode, as beyond belief. He cannot imagine that an adult "unconsciously" falls in love with his or her own mirror image, and then dies of this passionate love. But age does not affect the validity of the universal narcissistic structure, as the episodes of Captain Ahab in chapter 4 and of Gustav von Aschenbach in chapter 5 respectively will show; and even after the recognition of their drive, people may be overcome by their

---

<sup>19</sup> About the problem of Conon's influence on Ovid see Greve, in Roscher 3.1 (1897-1902): 12; Vinge, 21; Manuwald, 372.

passionate desire--as Ovid's Narcissus will demonstrate.

"There's no fool like an old fool," the proverb says.

Ἐπὶ δὲ ἄκρᾳ τῇ κορυφῇ τοῦ Ἑλικῶνος ποταμὸς οὐ μέγας ἐστὶν ὁ Λάμος. Θεσπιέων δὲ ἐν τῇ γῇ [ἡ] Δονακῶν ἐστὶν ὀνομαζόμενος· ἐνταῦθά ἐστι Ναρκίσσου πηγὴ, καὶ τὸν Νάρκισσον ἰδεῖν ἐς τοῦτο τὸ ὕδωρ φασίν. οὐ συνέντα δὲ ὅτι ἐώρα σκιάν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ λαθεῖν τε αὐτὸν ἐρασθέντα αὐτοῦ, καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἔρωτος ἐπὶ τῇ πηγῇ οἱ συμβῆναι τὴν τελευτήν. τοῦτο μὲν δὴ παντάπασιν εὐηθες, ἡλικίας· ἤδη τινὰ ἐς τοῦτο ἦκοντα ὥς ὑπὸ ἔρωτος ἀλίσκεσθαι μηδὲ ὁποῖόν τι ἄνθρωπος καὶ ὁποῖόν τι ἄνθρωπον σκιὰ διαγνῶναι·

In the territory of the Thespians is a place called Donacon (Reedbed). Here is the spring of Narcissus. They say that Narcissus looked into this water, and not understanding that he saw his own reflection, unconsciously fell in love with himself, and died of love at the spring. But it is utter stupidity to imagine that a man old enough to fall in love was incapable of distinguishing a man from a man's reflection.<sup>20</sup>

In Pausanias' second, euhemerized version, Narcissus is in love with his twin sister. This more rationalized version dismisses the motifs of error, frustrated passion, and death. Freud would have identified this version as Pausanias' "*Reaktionsbildung* [reaction-formation]" to avoid

---

<sup>20</sup> Pausanias, *Pausaniae Graeciae Descriptio*, ed. Hermann Hitzig and Hugo Blümner, 3 vols. (1896; reprint of the edition Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1907-1910, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1984), 3: 366; hereafter abbreviated as Pausanias 9.31.7/Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, trans. W. H. S. Jones, 5 vols. (1918; reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 4: 311.

the unpleasant facts of life.<sup>21</sup> Consequently, people adapt "reality" until it fits their ideal views.

ἔχει δὲ καὶ ἕτερος ἐς αὐτὸν λόγος. ἦσσαν μὲν τοῦ προτέρου γνώριμος. λεγόμενος δὲ καὶ οὗτος, ἀδελφὴν γενέσθαι Ναρκίσσῳ δίδυμον. τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐς ἅπαν ὅμοιον τὸ εἶδος καὶ ἀμφοτέροις ὡσαύτως κόμην εἶναι καὶ ἐσθῆτα ἐοικυῖαν αὐτοῦς ἐνδύεσθαι καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ θήραν ἰέναι μετὰ ἀλλήλων. Νάρκισσον δὲ ἐρασθῆναι τῆς ἀδελφῆς, καὶ ὡς ἀπέθανεν ἡ παῖς, φοιτῶντα ἐπὶ τὴν πηγὴν συνιέναι μὲν ὅτι τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σκιὰν ἑώρα, εἶναι δὲ οἱ καὶ συνιέτι ῥαστώνῃ τοῦ ἔρωτος ἅτε οὐχ ἑαυτοῦ σκιὰν δοξάζοντι, ἀλλὰ εἰκόνα ὁρᾶν τῆς ἀδελφῆς. νάρκισσον δὲ ἄνθος ἡ γῆ καὶ πρότερον ἔφυεν ἐμοὶ δοκεῖν, εἰ τοῖς Πάμφῳ τεκμαίρεσθαι χρή τι ἡμᾶς ἔπεισι· γεγονῶς γὰρ πολλοῖς πρότερον ἔτεσιν ἢ Νάρκισσος ὁ Θεσπιεὺς Κόρην τὴν Δημητρός φησιν ἀρπασθῆναι παίζουσιν καὶ ἄνθη συλλέγουσαν, ἀρπασθῆναι δὲ οὐκ ἴοις ἀπατηθεῖσαν ἀλλὰ ναρκίσσοις.

There is another story about Narcissus, less popular indeed than the other, but not without some support. It is said that Narcissus had a twin sister; they were exactly alike in appearance, their hair was the same, they wore similar clothes, and went hunting together. The story goes on that Narcissus fell in love with his sister, and when the girl died, would go to the spring, knowing that it was his reflection that he saw, but in spite of his knowledge finding some relief for his love in imagining that he saw, not his own reflection, but the likeness of his sister. The flower Narcissus grew, in my opinion, before this, if we are to judge by the verses of Pamphos. This poet was born many years before Narcissus the Thespian, and he says that the Maid, the daughter of Demeter, was carried off when she was playing and gathering flowers, and that the flowers by which she was deceived into being carried off were not violets, but the narcissus.<sup>22</sup>

According to this version, Narcissus consoled himself with looking at his reflection in the water to remind himself of

---

<sup>21</sup> See Sigmund Freud on "Die Verdrängung [Repression]" in *GW* 10: 248-261, especially 260/*SE* 14: 146-158, especially 157.

<sup>22</sup> Pausanias 9.31.8-9/Pausanias, trans. Jones, 4: 311.

his twin sister. This version is too good to be true. Wieseler already objected that Pausanias, even if he did not make it up, is likely to have falsified the second version. Pausanias' reluctance to accept a well-established detail of the myth--Narcissus' passing away and transformation into a flower a few lines later--as a true detail suggests the improbability of such a conclusion. Greek myths rarely have the quality of a fairy tale.

Even in minor accounts of the myth of Narcissus from the fourth and fifth centuries A.D. the core elements of the narcissistic structure (water as a catalyst, love of an image, suicide) appear. These accounts include very brief versions by Eustathius and Eudocia who name a Leirioessa as Narcissus' mother and describe Narcissus' suicide as falling in love with his beautiful mirror image, and drowning in the water.<sup>23</sup> Vibius Sequester has Leiriope as the name of the spring in which Narcissus sees his mirror image. An anonymous Roman poet explains Narcissus' fixation on his mirror image as an expression of his search for his father. Narcissus, son of a river god, would look for his absent father in any water.<sup>24</sup> According to the grammarian Probus

---

<sup>23</sup> Wieseler, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Wieseler, 5-6.

(fourth century A.D.), Narcissus was murdered by Euippos; from his blood the flower sprang.<sup>25</sup>

Another figure, which gained prominence with Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus, is the nymph Echo. Traditionally the personification of resonance, Echo does not appear as a nymph before Euripides (*Hecuba* 1111).<sup>26</sup> In Greek poetry she is linked to Pan where, in contrast to Ovid's version, she is the one who rejects lovers. This study refrains from commenting on Ovid's Echo figure because she does not affect the narcissistic structure of the human subject in any way. Ovid's Echo functions as just another addition to reinforce the imaginary or narcissistic identification. The connection between Narcissus and Echo does not seem to have existed before Ovid.<sup>27</sup> Likewise, the names of Narcissus' parents and the linkage to the seer Tiresias seem to be Ovid's invention.<sup>28</sup> Apart from these minor accounts of the myth of Narcissus in Classical

---

<sup>25</sup> Wieseler, 7-8 and Zimmerman, 9-11 referring to Probus, *ad Eclogue* 2.48.

<sup>26</sup> The figure Echo has interested feminist critics, for instance, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Echo," *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 17-43. For a study of Echo as a figure of speech see John Hollander, *The Figure of Echo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

<sup>27</sup> Waser, "Echo," in *RE* 5 (1905): 1926-1930, here 1927; Bömer, 537.

<sup>28</sup> Buslepp, "Tiresias," in *Roscher* 5 (1916-1924): 178-207.

literature, other versions either depend on Ovid or provide no new details.<sup>29</sup>

### OID'S VERSION OF THE MYTH OF NARCISSUS

In Ovid's version (*Metamorphoses* 3.339-510), the myth of Narcissus is embedded in a number of stories which all deal with the motif of fatal seeing. Even though the context of each individual story is different, the motif of forbidden seeing links these stories within book 3 of the *Metamorphoses*. Moreover, the vengeance episodes in book 3 are linked by another motif, Juno's anger.<sup>30</sup>

Ille per Aonias fama celeberrimus urbes  
 340 inreprehensa dabat populo responsa petenti;  
 prima fide vocisque ratae temptamina sumpsit  
 caerula Liriope, quam quondam flumine curvo  
 implicuit clausaeque suis Cephisos in undis  
 vim tulit. enixa est utero pulcherrima pleno  
 345 infantem nymphe, iam tunc qui posset amari,  
 Narcissumque vocat; de quo consultus, an esset  
 tempora maturae visurus longa senectae,  
 fatidicus vates 'si se non noverit' inquit.  
 vana diu visa est vox auguris, exitus illam  
 350 resque probat letique genus novitasque furoris.  
 namque ter ad quinos unum Cephisius annum  
 addiderat poteratque puer iuvenisque videri:  
 multi illum iuvenes, multae cupiere puellae;  
 sed (fuit in tenera tam dura superbia forma)

---

<sup>29</sup> Zimmerman 9-11 mentions Nonnus, Callistratus, Probus, and Philargyrus. See *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, ed. P. G. W. Glare (1968; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982) (abbreviated as *OLD*) s. v. "Narcissus" 1, 1155 listing *Ov. Fast.* 5.225 and *Stat. Silv.* 1.5.55 as the only references in Classical Latin. All uses in Vergil, *Ecl.* 5.38; *G.* 4.160; *Ciris* 96 refer to the flower.

<sup>30</sup> See the graphic in Hubert Cancik, "Spiegel der Erkenntnis," *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 10 (1967): 46; Brooks Otis, *Ovid as an Epic Poet*, 2nd ed. (1966; reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 84, 128-129, 157-158.



- 355 nulli illum iuvenes, nullae tetigere puellae.  
 adspicit hunc trepidos agitantem in retia cervos  
 vocalis nymphe, quae nec reticere loquenti  
 nec prius ipsa loqui didicit, resonabilis Echo.  
 corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat; et tamen usum  
 360 garrula non alium, quam nunc habet, oris habebat,  
 reddere de multis ut verba novissima posset.  
 fecerat hoc Iuno, quia, cum deprendere posset  
 sub Iove saepe suo nymphas in monte iacentes,  
 illa deam longo prudens sermone tenebat,  
 365 dum fugerent nymphae. postquam hoc Saturnia sensit,  
 'huius' ait 'linguae, qua sum delusa, potestas  
 parva tibi dabitur vocisque brevissimus usus',  
 reque minas firmat; tamen haec in fine loquendi  
 ingeminat voces auditaque verba reportat.  
 370 ergo ubi Narcissum per devia rura vagantem  
 vidit et incaluit, sequitur vestigia furtim,  
 quoque magis sequitur, flamma propiore calescit,  
 non aliter quam cum summis circumlita taedis  
 admotas rapiunt vivacia sulphura flammās.  
 375 o quotiens voluit blandis accedere dictis  
 et molles adhibere preces! natura repugnat  
 nec sinit, incipiat; sed, quod sinit, illa parata est  
 exspectare sonos, ad quos sua verba remittat.  
 forte puer comitum seductus ab agmine fido  
 380 dixerat: 'ecquis adest?', et 'adest' responderat Echo.  
 hic stupet, utque aciem partes dimittit in omnes,  
 voce 'veni' magna clamat: vocat illa vocantem.  
 respicit et rursus nullo veniente 'quid' inquit  
 'me fugis?' et totidem, quot dixit, verba recepit.  
 385 perstat et alternae deceptus imagine vocis  
 'huc coeamus' ait, nullique libentius umquam  
 responsura sono 'coeamus' rettulit Echo  
 et verbis favet ipsa suis egressaque silva  
 ibat, ut iniceret sperato bracchia collo.  
 390 ille fugit fugiensque 'manus complexibus aufer!  
 ante' ait 'emoriā, quam sit tibi copia nostri.'  
 rettulit illa nihil nisi 'sit tibi copia nostri.'  
 sprete latet silvis pudibundaque frondibus ora  
 protegit et solis ex illo vivit in antris;  
 395 sed tamen haeret amor crescitque dolore repulsae:  
 et tenuant vigiles corpus miserabile curae,  
 adducitque cutem macies et in aëra sucus  
 corporis omnis abit; vox tantum atque ossa supersunt:  
 vox manet; ossa ferunt lapidis traxisse figuram.  
 400 inde latet silvis nulloque in monte videtur,  
 omnibus auditur: sonus est, qui vivit in illa.  
 Sic hanc, sic alias undis aut montibus ortas  
 luserat hic nymphas, sic coetus ante viriles;  
 inde manus aliquis despectus ad aethera tollens  
 405 'sic amet ipse licet, sic non potiatur amato!'

- dixerat: adsensit precibus Rhamnusia iustis.  
 fons erat inlimis, nitidis argenteus undis,  
 quem neque pastores neque pastae monte capellae  
 contigerant aliudve pecus, quem nulla volucris  
 410 nec fera turbarat nec lapsus ab arbore ramus;  
 gramen erat circa, quod proximus umor alebat,  
 silvaeque sole locum passura tepescere nullo.  
 hic puer et studio venandi lassus et aestu  
 procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus,  
 415 dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit,  
 dumque bibit, visae conreptus imagine formae  
 spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod unda  
 est.  
 adstupet ipse sibi vultuque inmotus eodem  
 haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum.  
 420 spectat humi positus geminum, sua lumina, sidus  
 et dignos Baccho, dignos et Apolline crines  
 inpubesque genas et eburnea colla decusque  
 oris et in niveo mixtum candore ruborem  
 cunctaque miratur, quibus est mirabilis ipse.  
 425 se cupit imprudens et, qui probat, ipse probatur,  
 dumque petit, petitur, pariterque accendit et ardet.  
 inrita fallaci quotiens dedit oscula fonti!  
 in mediis quotiens visum captantia collum  
 bracchia mersit aquis nec se deprendit in illis!  
 430 quid videat, nescit, sed quod videt, uritur illo  
 atque oculos idem, qui decipit, incitat error.  
 credule, quid frustra simulacra fugacia captas?  
 quod petis, est nusquam; quod amas, avertere, perdes.  
 ista repercussae, quam cernis, imaginis umbra est:  
 435 nil habet ista sui; tecum venitque manetque,  
 tecum discedet, si tu discedere possis.  
 non illum Cereris, non illum cura quietis  
 abstrahere inde potest, sed opaca fusus in herba  
 spectat inexploto mendacem lumine formam  
 440 perque oculos perit ipse suos; paulumque levatus,  
 ad circumstantes tendens sua bracchia silvas  
 'ecquis, io silvae, crudelius' inquit 'amavit?  
 scitis enim et multis latebra opportuna fuistis.  
 ecquem, cum vestrae tot agantur saecula vitae,  
 445 qui sic tabuerit, longo meministis in aevo?  
 et placet et video, sed, quod videoque placetque,  
 non tamen invenio: tantus tenet error amantem!  
 quoque magis doleam, nec nos mare separat ingens  
 nec via nec montes nec clausis moenia portis:  
 450 exigua prohibemur aqua! cupit ipse teneri!  
 nam quotiens liquidis porreximus oscula lymphis,  
 hic totiens ad me resupino nititur ore;  
 posse putes tangi: minimum est, quod amantibus obstat.  
 quisquis es, huc exi! quid me, puer unice, fallis  
 455 quove petitus abis? certe nec forma nec aetas

est mea, quam fugias, et amarunt me quoque nymphae.  
 spem mihi nescio quam vultu promittis amico,  
 cumque ego porrexī tibi bracchia, porrigis ultro;  
 cum risi, adrides; lacrimas quoque saepe notavi  
 460 me lacrimante tuas; nutu quoque signa remittis  
 et, quantum motu formosi suspicor oris,  
 verba refers aures non pervenientia nostras.  
 iste ego sum! sensi; nec me mea fallit imago:  
 uror amore mei: flammās moveoque feroque.  
 465 quid faciam? roger, anne rogem? quid deinde rogabo?  
 quod cupio, mecum est: inopem me copia fecit.  
 o utinam a nostro secedere corpore possem!  
 votum in amante novum: vellem, quod amamus, abesset!  
 iamque dolor vires adimit, nec tempora vitae  
 470 longa meae superant, primoque exstinguor in aevo.  
 nec mihi mors gravis est, posituro morte dolores:  
 hic, qui diligitur, vellem, diuturnior esset!  
 nunc duo concordēs anima moriemur in una.'  
 dixit et ad faciem rediit male sanus eandem  
 475 et lacrimis turbavit aquas, obscuraque moto  
 reddita forma lacu est. quam cum vidisset abire,  
 'quo refugis? remane nec me, crudelis, amantem  
 desere!' clamavit; 'liceat, quod tangere non est,  
 adspicere et misero praebere alimenta furori!'  
 480 dumque dolet, summa vestem deduxit ab ora  
 nudaque marmoreis percussit pectora palmis.  
 pectora traxerunt roseum percussa ruborem,  
 non aliter quam poma solent, quae candida parte,  
 parte rubent, aut ut variis solet uva racemis  
 485 ducere purpureum nondum matura colorem.  
 quae simul adspexit liquefacta rursus in unda,  
 non tulit ulterius, sed, ut intabescere flavae  
 igne levi cerae matutinaeque pruinae  
 sole tepente solent, sic attenuatus amore  
 490 liquitur et tecto paulatim carpitur igni  
 et neque iam color est mixto candore rubori  
 nec vigor et vires et quae modo visa placebant,  
 nec corpus remanet, quondam quod amaverat Echo.  
 quae tamen ut vidit, quamvis irata memorque,  
 495 indoluit, quotiensque puer miserabilis 'eheu'  
 dixerat, haec resonis iterabat vocibus 'eheu'.  
 cumque suos manibus percusserat ille lacertos,  
 haec quoque reddebat sonitum plangoris eundem.  
 ultima vox solitam fuit haec spectantis in undam:  
 500 'heu frustra dilecte puer!' totidemque remisit  
 verba locus, dictoque vale 'vale' inquit et Echo.  
 ille caput viridi fessum submisit in herba,  
 lumina mors clausit domini mirantia formam.  
 tum quoque se, postquam est inferna sede receptus,  
 505 in Stygia spectabat aqua. planxere sorores  
 naides et sectos fratri posuere capillos,

planxerunt dryades: plangentibus adsonat Echo.  
 iamque rogam quassasque faces feretrumque parabant:  
 nusquam corpus erat, croceum pro corpore florem  
 510 inveniunt foliis medium cingentibus albis.<sup>31</sup>

[Tiresias'] fame was spread abroad throughout the  
 Aonian cities,  
 340 and when the people asked he would give them unblamable  
 responses.  
 The first to engage in a trial of his word and his  
 reliability  
 was aquamarine Liriope; Cephisos had once caught hold  
 of her  
 in his winding stream and, when he had confined her in  
 his waves,  
 he took her violently. She was a most beautiful nymph  
 and bore  
 345 from her full womb a baby boy who even then could have  
 been loved,  
 and she called him Narcissus. When consulted about  
 him, whether he  
 would see the lengthy days of a ripe old age,  
 the oracular seer said, 'If he does not get to know  
 himself.'  
 For a long time the augur's word seemed empty: but  
 the outcome and the event  
 350 confirmed it, as did the nature of his fate and the  
 strangeness of his passion.  
 For when the Cephisian had added one year to three  
 times  
 five, and could seem to be a boy or man,  
 many men, many girls desired him;  
 but (there was in his delicate beauty so stiff a pride)  
 355 no men, no girls affected him.  
 As he was driving nervous stags into the nets, he was  
 noticed  
 by a talkative nymph who had learnt neither to keep  
 silent  
 for a speaker nor to speak first herself, she was  
 soundrepeating Echo.  
 Echo was still a body, not a voice; and yet the  
 chatterbox  
 360 had no other use for her mouth than she has now,  
 that she could return the very last words out of many.

---

<sup>31</sup> Line numbers, unless noted otherwise, refer to book 3 of Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, ed. William S. Anderson, 4th ed. (1977; reprint, Leipzig: Teubner, 1988) (abbreviated as *Ov. Met.*).

- (Juno had done this because often, when she could have caught  
nymphs lying under her Jupiter on the mountain,  
she would deliberately hold the goddess up with lengthy  
conversation  
365 until the nymphs could escape. And when Saturnia  
realized it,  
'The power of this tongue,' she said, 'by which I have  
been tricked,  
will be rendered slight, and the use of your voice  
most brief.'  
And she confirmed her threats with action: nevertheless  
she does reiterate words  
at the ends of speeches, and repeats what she had  
heard.)
- 370 So when, as Narcissus roamed through remote country,  
she saw him and caught fire, she followed his footsteps  
secretly,  
and the more she followed the closer the flame that  
fired her,  
just as when lively sulphur daubed around the tops of  
torches seizes on the flames brought near.
- 375 Oh how often did she want to approach him with coaxing  
words  
and make soft prayers to him! Her condition fought  
against it  
and did not allow her to begin; but, and it did allow  
this, she prepared herself  
to wait for sounds at which she could send back her  
words.  
It happened that the boy, separated from his band of  
faithful comrades,  
380 had said, 'Is there anybody here?' and, 'Here,' Echo  
had replied.  
He was stunned and directed his gaze in all directions  
shouting, 'Come,' in a loud voice: she called the  
caller.  
He looked round again and when no one came, 'Why,'  
he said,  
'do you flee from me?' And he got back just as many  
words as he had spoken.
- 385 He persisted, deceived as he was by the illusion of an  
answering voice;  
'Here, let us come together,' he said and Echo, who  
would never respond  
more willingly to any sound, replied, 'Let us come  
together,'  
and she helped her words along by leaving the wood  
and coming to throw her arms upon the neck that she had  
longed for.
- 390 He fled and, as he fled, 'Hands off, do not embrace me.

I would die,' he said, 'before I would offer myself to  
 you.'  
 She answered nothing except, 'I would offer myself  
 to you.'  
 Spurned, she hid in the woods and, in her shame,  
 covered her face  
 with foliage and lived henceforth in lonely caves;  
 395 and yet her love clung to her and grew with the pain of  
 rejection:  
 her cares kept her awake and made her body pitiably  
 thin,  
 her skin wasted and shrivelled up and all her body's  
 moisture went off into the air; only her voice and  
 bones were left:  
 her voice remained; her bones, they say, took on the  
 appearance of stone.  
 400 Since then she has hidden in the woods and is never  
 seen on the mountains,  
 she is heard by all: but it is only sound that lives in  
 her.  
 So he had toyed with her and so with the other  
 nymphs that were sprung  
 from waves or mountains and so, earlier, with crowds of  
 men;  
 till one of those he had disdained raised his hands up  
 towards the ether  
 405 and said, 'So may he too love, so may he not gain  
 what he has loved' Rhamnusia assented to this just  
 prayer.  
 There was a slimeless spring, with shimmering, silvery  
 waters,  
 which neither shepherds nor goats that graze upon the  
 mountain  
 had touched, nor any other flock, which no bird  
 410 nor wild beast had disturbed, nor any branch fallen  
 from a tree.  
 There was grass around it, nurtured by nearby water,  
 and a wood that let no sunshine in to overheat the  
 place.  
 Here the boy, tired from keen hunting and the heat,  
 had lain down, drawn there by the spring and by the  
 beauty of the place,  
 415 and while he wanted to relieve his thirst, another  
 thirst grew in him,  
 and while he drank, he saw a beautiful reflection and  
 was captivated,  
 he loved a hope without a body, and what he thought was  
 body was but water.  
 He was overwhelmed by himself and, unmoving and holding  
 the same expression,

- he was fixed there like a statue moulded out of Parian marble.
- 420 As he lay there on the ground, he gazed at the twin stars that were his eyes, and at his locks that were worthy of Bacchus, and worthy of Apollo too, and at his unbearded cheeks, his ivory-coloured neck and his glorious face, its blush mingled with a snowy radiance, and he admired everything for which he was himself admired.
- 425 Unwittingly, he desired himself and both praised and was himself the praised one, and while he sought, he was being sought, and he was at once both burning and igniting. How many times did he give vain kisses to the deceitful spring! How many times did he plunge into the middle of the waters arms that tried to clasp the neck that he had seen, but he did not clasp himself in there!
- 430 He did not know what he was seeing, but he was on fire at what he saw, and his eyes were thrilled and misled by the same confusion. Naive one, why do you vainly clasp at fleeting images? What you seek is nowhere; turn away, and you will lose your beloved. What you are looking at is a shadow, a reflected image.
- 435 It has nothing of its own: it comes and stays with you, with you it will depart, if only you could depart. No thought of Ceres, no thought of rest could drag him from there but, stretched out upon the shady grass, he gazed at the deceiving image with an insatiable gaze
- 440 and by his own eyes he was himself undone; then raising himself a little, he stretched his arms out to the woods that stood around him and said, 'Alas, oh woods, is there anyone who has loved more painfully? For you know, since many lovers have found in you a ready hiding place. Is there anyone that you remember in your long lifetime, since you have lived
- 445 for so many centuries, that has pined away like this? I am delighted by what I see, but what I see and what delights me,

that I cannot find: so much confusion thwarts this  
 lover.  
 And, to make me grieve the more, there is no vast sea  
 that separates us,  
 nor a road, nor mountains, nor city walls with closed  
 gates:  
 we are kept apart by a little bit of water! He too  
 wants to be held;  
 450 for, whenever I have stretched my lips down to the  
 clear waters,  
 each time he has strained towards me with upturned  
 mouth.  
 You would think he could be touched: it is so small a  
 thing that stops our love.  
 Whoever you are, come out here! Why do you deceive  
 me, matchless boy,  
 455 when I reach for you, where do you go? Well, at least  
 it's not my beauty,  
 nor my age that makes you run away; and the nymphs  
 have loved me too.  
 There is some sort of hope you offer me with your  
 friendly look,  
 and when I stretch my arms to you, you stretch yours  
 back in return.  
 When I smile, you smile back; and I have often noticed  
 your tears too,  
 460 when I have been shedding tears; when I nod too, you  
 return the sign  
 and, as far as I can guess from the movements of your  
 beautiful mouth,  
 you answer me with words that do not reach my ears.  
 I am that one! I realize it and my reflection does  
 not deceive me.  
 I am burning with a love for myself, I both excite  
 the flames and suffer them.  
 465 What am I to do? Am I to be wooed, or do I woo? And  
 then, how shall I woo?  
 What I desire is with me: my plenty has made me poor.  
 Oh would that I were able to withdraw from my body;  
 and, a strange wish in a lover, I should like what  
 I love to be apart.  
 And now the pain is taking my strength away, my life  
 470 has no long time left, I am being cut off in my youth.  
 Death is no burden for me, for in death I shall lay  
 aside this pain:  
 but I would wish that he that I have adored might live  
 longer.  
 As it is, the two of us will die in a single breath.'  
 He spoke and, in his sickness, went back to that same  
 face;



- 475 with his tears he disturbed the waters and the image  
       that came back to him  
 from the lake in motion was obscured. And, when he  
       saw that it was gone,  
 'Where are you fleeing to? Stay, do not, cruel one,  
       abandon me,  
 your lover,' he cried, 'and let me gaze on what I may  
       not  
 touch, and so give nourishment to my unhappy passion.'  
 480 And while he agonized, he pulled his cloak off by its  
       upper hem  
 and beat his bare breast with his alabaster palms.  
 His breast took on a rosy blush under the blows,  
 just as apples will when they are white in one part  
 and blushing in another, or as, among the many-coloured  
       bunches, a grape  
 485 which has not ripened yet will take on a purple colour.  
 And as soon as he saw this in the water, now cleared  
       again,  
 he could not bear it any longer but, just as yellow wax  
 will melt before a low fire, or the morning frost  
 in warm sunshine, so was he wasted and dissolved  
 490 by love and slowly consumed by its hidden fire;  
 and he no longer had that fair complexion mingled with  
       a blush,  
 nor his strength and vigour and those things which,  
       when seen just now, had pleased him;  
 and that body was no more, which Echo once had loved.  
 But, when she saw him, in spite of her anger and her  
       memories,  
 495 she was pained for him, and whenever the pitiable boy,  
       'Alas,'  
 had said, she would repeat with an echoing voice,  
       'Alas.'  
 And when he beat his arms and shoulders with his hands,  
 she too would return the same sound of grief.  
 His last words were these, as he gazed into the  
       familiar spring,  
 'Alas, oh boy adored in vain,' and the place returned  
 those very words, and when he had said farewell,  
       'Farewell,' said Echo too.  
 He lowered his weary head onto the green grass,  
 death closed the eyes still admiring the beauty of  
       their lord.  
 And after he had been received by the place below,  
       even then  
 505 he would gaze upon himself in the water of the Styx.  
       His Naiad sisters  
 grieved for him and offered their shorn locks for their  
       brother,

the Dryads grieved for him; and Echo resounded to them  
 as they grieved.  
 They were now preparing a pyre, torches to shake and a  
 bier:  
 but the body was nowhere; instead of the body they  
 found a flower  
 510 with white petals surrounding its yellow centre.<sup>32</sup>

### THE PSYCHOANALYTIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE MYTH

After having presented Ovid's text and some other classical sources, I now come to analyze the psychoanalytic implications of Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus. In the field of Classics, "[t]extual, rather than narrative[,] criticism . . . continues to dominate the study of the text," Kenneth Knoespel objects.<sup>33</sup> The myth of Narcissus, however, disguises the narcissistic structure of the human subject which is latent in all people and thus also symptomatic with some literary figures. A psychoanalytic, i.e., Lacanian reading of *Metamorphoses* 3.339-510 as a literary case can help us understand the narcissistic structure of the Narcissus figure, and, ultimately, certain aspects of our own neurotic behavior. An understanding of

---

<sup>32</sup> Except for line 368 where Anderson reads *tamen* instead of *tantum*, the text--which is based on R. J. Tarrant, who is preparing a text for the Oxford Classical Texts series--follows Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1-4, ed. and trans. D. E. Hill (Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris and Phillips, 1985) (abbreviated as Hill), 107-115. The textual variations in lines 345 *tunc* (Anderson) *tum* (Hill), 358 *prius* *prior*, 396 *et* *tenuant* *attenuant* do not alter the translation.

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Jacob Knoespel, *Narcissus and the Invention of Personal History* (New York: Garland, 1985), 1.

the narcissistic configuration would be rather revolutionary in a world which still continues to display an abundance of homicidal violence and deadly narcissistic or suicidal behavior. Reading the myth of Narcissus as a literary case will also allow us to understand the universal aspects of narcissistic behavior concerning human relationships, and, ultimately, enable us to change our behavior. To establish my point, I will now present two very different interpretations of Ovid's myth of Narcissus, i.e., at the center of my thesis, a Lacanian reading of myth as a literary case revealing the narcissistic structure of the human subject, and, as a preliminary, a Kohutian reading of narcissistic behavior as a result of a flawed parent-child relationship.

#### **A KOHUTIAN READING OF OVID'S TEXT**

Any Kohutian interpretation of the myth of Narcissus based on external circumstances--as plausible as it may appear--is bound to remain at the surface level and thus highly speculative. Alice Miller's interpretation of Ovid's text, which is grounded in the findings of Heinz Kohut's school of self psychology, may serve as a first example.<sup>34</sup> Klaus Schlagmann's reading of the myth, who passionately endorses Miller as "the mother of real psychoanalysis," may

---

<sup>34</sup> Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood*, 49.

serve as another example.<sup>35</sup> The basic faults with these interpretations, which largely depend on the interpreter's subjective view, include a tendency to oversimplify things and the danger of transference.<sup>36</sup> Despite the fact that Miller's and Schlagmann's interpretations of the myth of Narcissus are limited to the behavioral level, they seem to be very plausible at first sight.

Miller's line of argument may at least help to clarify the questions as to the reasons why some people suffer more from the narcissistic structure than others. Two key concepts form the basis of Miller's reading of the myth: one is "healthy narcissism," the other one is "narcissistic disturbance."

Healthy narcissism, as defined by Miller,<sup>37</sup> allows the child to express all kinds of feelings--except for incestuous feelings, Lacan would object. Healthy narcissism would allow the child to strive toward autonomy and experience and express aggressive and other feelings such as jealousy, anger, or defiance. In this fortunate but rare scenario of child development, the child is able to

---

<sup>35</sup> Schlagmann, 13-14: "[Alice Miller] ist für mich die Mutter der wahren 'Psychoanalyse' [To me, Alice Miller is the mother of real psychoanalysis]."

<sup>36</sup> Emilio Modena, "Unter dem Banner des Narzißmus: Gedanken zu einem psychoanalytischen Bestseller," in *Die neuen Narzißmustheorien*, 157-161.

<sup>37</sup> Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood*, 32-34.

"cathect" its mother narcissistically. In other words, the child can "make use of" the parent, who, in our patriarchally organized society, usually is the mother. In this model, if the mother feels independent of the child and happens to see the child as a separate being from herself, she is able to distinguish between herself as subject and her child as object, and the child is able to learn to distinguish between self and object. If the child has acquired a self identity, Miller further argues, it will find it easier to love others as objects later.

Healthy narcissism, Miller continues, leads to self-esteem and a healthy self-feeling of the child. In Schlagmann's words, the lucky child has a mother and a father, available to serve as parents and fulfill the child's needs for food, emotional support, and protection.<sup>38</sup> Miller's implicit and arguable assumption is that a non-patriarchially organized society may serve the needs of children better.

If the child meets unfortunate circumstances, however, the parents will not offer enough, or any, emotional support to the child. According to Miller, the neurosis that has been described in the myth of Narcissus represents the tragedy of the narcissistic disturbance, a condition which

---

<sup>38</sup> Schlagmann, 44.

is characterized by feelings of depression and grandiosity.<sup>39</sup> Miller argues that a mother exploiting her child emotionally may be the cause for narcissistic behavior--but does not say anything about fathers exploiting their children. If a mother herself is in need of narcissistic supplies, Miller argues, she will take from the child what *she* needs emotionally. According to Schlagmann, the lack of emotional support will cause the child to experience fear, pain, and poverty. Furthermore, such a child will regard the circumstances it encounters as normal, and develop to be very insecure.

The rape of a mother, as befell Narcissus' mother Liriope, is one very plausible reason for any woman to be emotionally needy, even years after the incident.<sup>40</sup> Schlagmann further speculates that, in a patriarchal society where discrimination against women is not uncommon, probably even Liriope's mother had felt uncomfortable developing into a female sexual being.<sup>41</sup> But this kind of speculative

---

<sup>39</sup> Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood*, 34-48.

<sup>40</sup> Ann Wolbert Burgess and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom, "Assessing Trauma in the Rape Victim," *American Journal of Nursing* 75 (1975): 1288-1291. Also see under "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder" in American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R)*, 3rd revised ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987), 247-248.

<sup>41</sup> Schlagmann, 32-33.

analysis does not lead anywhere because, as a nymph, Liriope is a literary figure and not a human subject.

Be that as it may, a fact is that, in Ovid's version of the myth of Narcissus, Liriope had the terrible experience of being raped as a young woman:

caerula Liriope, quam quondam flumine curvo  
implicuit clausaeque suis Cephisos in undis  
vim tulit.

Cephisos had once caught hold of aquamarine Liriope  
in his winding stream and, when he had confined her in  
his waves,  
he took her violently.<sup>42</sup>

Liriope further experienced this violation of the boundaries of her body as remaining without any consequences to the violator. Unconsciously, and even contrary to her intention, a mother, such as Liriope, will downplay the abusive character of the action, consider the sexual abuse as normal, repeat what she experienced in a similar way, and take advantage of her own child in a narcissistic manner. According to Miller, such a raped mother "then tries to assuage her own narcissistic needs through her child, that is, she cathects him narcissistically."<sup>43</sup> In my transference, I used to perceive myself as such a child who

---

<sup>42</sup> Ov. *Met.* 3.342-344/Hill, 107.

<sup>43</sup> Miller, *Prisoners of Childhood*, 34.

had been narcissistically cathected by his mother. Although such a terrible experience as the rape of a woman may have its negative effects on the manner in which she raises her children, a rape of a mother does not constitute the narcissistic structure of the human subject.

Children are more or less at the disposal of their parents, Miller points out correctly. Whatever a child may demand, as an adult, a mother is no longer helpless or defenseless in the parent-child relationship and will not allow herself to be tyrannized. She has the upper hand in this relationship and can bring up the child in the way she wants. According to Miller, a mother's attitude towards her child in such a case does not even have to exclude affectionate feelings but her love does not allow the continuity that would give her child the insurance and space to live out whatever feelings may come up.

Emilio Modena, in contrast, claims that the narcissistic disturbance may evolve for many other reasons--citing as the only other reason the absence of the father.<sup>44</sup> In patriarchal societies, usually the father is working most of the time, or is, in any case, not available for the child. In the case of Narcissus, nothing is said about his father Cephisos beyond the fact that he raped and impregnated Liriope. Nothing is said about Cephisos' role

---

<sup>44</sup> Modena, 155-156.



in the education of his son Narcissus, but since Cephisos is not even mentioned, one might as well assume that Narcissus did not have any significant contact with his absent father.<sup>45</sup>

The drama of the gifted child (*Das Drama des begabten Kindes*)--the original German title of Miller's book--is, according to the Swiss analyst, the absence of the child's father and the emotional neediness of the child's mother--and it is a drama indeed, but has little to do with the narcissistic structure of the human subject, as we will soon see. A child, who needs its mother to survive, Miller continues, will unconsciously develop a behavior that helps its mother but not itself. By figuring out what the mother or parents need, the child may secure itself its life, i.e., the love of the mother or parents, but may not have a chance to be itself all life long because it has to put its own legitimate needs, which are normal and inevitable during an early development stage in life, on hold. If a mother proves to be unreliable, insecure, anxious, or hostile during the infant years of the child, this child will develop the same character traits and be less assertive than other children. The child, who has been abused by an emotionally needy mother, may develop the intellectual

---

<sup>45</sup> About the phenomenon of the absent father see Wilfried Wieck, *Söhne wollen Väter: Wider die weibliche Umklammerung* (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1992), 94-100.

powers greatly to survive these disadvantageous circumstances--it may prove to be "gifted"--but remain emotionally impaired. According to Miller, such a child is torn between grandiosity and depression--the diagnostic criteria of the "narcissistic personality disorder" according to *DSM-IV*--and mixed forms of these two extremes. The child has been forced to be grandiose in the first place to satisfy the needs of the "narcissistically" impaired parents.

As long as parents project their own narcissistic dreams through their children, these children will suffer. The child who attempts to fight depression through grandiose behavior blocks out the deeper pain of the loss of its self-consciousness. The tension between grandiosity and depression has far-reaching consequences for the mental health of the child; some children cannot cope with that kind of tension and hence commit suicide or perish in other ways.

But Modena rightly senses a danger of using myth as a means of projection for one's personal fantasies--what Lacan labels the neurotic's individual myth which reflects in a way incomprehensible to the subject the inaugural relationship between father, mother, and human subject.<sup>46</sup> According to Lacan, the drama of the neurotic presents

---

<sup>46</sup> Modena, 161; Lacan, "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," 414.

itself in the human subject who attempts to make the present situation coincide with the original situation.<sup>47</sup> In another context, Herma and Sebastian Goeppert address this problem of transference and counter-transference which may interfere with one's interpretation of a literary text negatively. In any psychoanalytic interpretation, Goeppert and Goeppert argue, the interpreter, who is in danger of falling into unconscious transference processes, may reduce a complex literary work, overinterpret details, and not be aware of his or her own bias.<sup>48</sup>

In summary, the Kohutian interpretations of the myth of Narcissus along the lines of the school of self psychology do not explain the narcissistic structure of the human subject but only people's behavior in a highly speculative manner. The absence of the father and the emotional neediness of the mother may function as catalysts to worsen a child's situation--but these factors do not determine the narcissistic structure, which is universal to all human subjects. Schlagmann rightly concludes that terms, such as "narcissism" or "narcissistic disorder," are frequently used inappropriately, and rarely helpful in describing people's behavior.<sup>49</sup> Even the child of perfectly caring and

---

<sup>47</sup> Lacan, "The Neurotic's Individual Myth," 415.

<sup>48</sup> Goeppert, 75-76.

<sup>49</sup> Schlagmann, 45.

emotionally balanced parents is bound to long for narcissistic identification with a substitute image (other/*Ichideal*) because people will not be able to have their unconscious desires fulfilled. The roots of people's narcissistic identification lie with the organization of humanity, and only to a minor degree with the emotional balance, or imbalance, of the parent-child relationship.

### **A LACANIAN READING OF OVID'S TEXT**

The advantage of Lacan's structural approach over any other type lies in its universality which does not depend on external circumstances. Even though Jacques Lacan devoted two lectures "On Narcissism" and on "The Two Narcissisms" in March 1954 during his Seminar One, the French psychoanalyst, like Sigmund Freud, did not provide a ready-made interpretation of the myth of Narcissus. Staying away from the actual myth, Lacan rather brings Freud's article "On Narcissism" to the attention of his students but leaves the desirable task of interpreting the literary account to his audience.

The first ten lines of Ovid's story in *Metamorphoses* 3.339-510 form the transition from the previous Tiresias episode to the story of Narcissus and Echo. Before Narcissus' mother Liriope takes advantage of Tiresias' gift of prescience, one learns about the circumstances of

Narcissus' birth. Narcissus' mother, the blue<sup>50</sup> water nymph Liriope, was raped by the river-god Cephissus while she was confined in his waters. As a consequence, the most beautiful nymph gave birth to a child, named Narcissus, who was already adorable as a baby.

One of Lacan's findings is that the Other (Autre), the law, language, or the Symbolic (S) dominate the child's life even before its birth, its self-recognition, or its narcissistic identification. The Other, representing society's demands, is one of the forces directly influencing any human subject from the beginning, as Lacan indicated in his Schéma L in chapter two; the vector which directly leads from the symbolic sphere of the Other (Autre) to the ego (moi). Even before the human subject starts identifying with other people, i.e., the other (autre), the parents, i.e., the Other (Autre), have made their mark on the newly-born child by giving the child its name and designating its role in the family: "*enixa est utero pulcherrima pleno infantem nymphe, iam tunc qui posset amari, Narcissumque vocat* [She was a most beautiful nymph and bore from her full womb a baby boy who even then could have been loved and she called

---

<sup>50</sup> Edgeworth, 108 notes the use of the adjective *caeruleus* in connection with the sea monster Scylla; "and the colors blue and green are very frequently used in Latin literature as the colors of water deities' hair, clothing, or even skin."

him Narcissus]."<sup>51</sup> The naming of the child by the Other is significant because this universal act demonstrates that everyone's identity is shaped through language--and not through external circumstances such as the rape of a mother.

The Other (*Autre*) also influences the ego (*moi*) of every human being indirectly--via narcissistic identification--through the unconscious (*Es*) and the image of the other (*autre*). Lacan's work thus very much emblemizes Rimbaud's notion that the ego or "I is an other," a notion which fundamentally represents the structure of the myth of Narcissus. Before Narcissus' narcissistic identification becomes symptomatic in Ovid's text, the source of this imaginary identification is hinted.

The seer Tiresias, when asked about the fate of Liriope's son, predicts "lengthy days of ripe old age" for Narcissus "if he does not get to know himself,"<sup>52</sup> i.e., if he does not come to know his incestuous desire. For a long time Tiresias' prophecy--which ironically inverts the inscription at Delphi: Γνῶθι σεαυτόν--seemed obscure. The Greek command to come to know oneself entails the Stoic advice to control oneself and to be modest, and not to be trapped by the hubris that Ulrich von Wilamowitz-

---

<sup>51</sup> *Ov. Met.* 3.344-346/Hill, 107.

<sup>52</sup> *Ov. Met.* 3.348/Hill, 107.

Moellendorff calls heretical self-love.<sup>53</sup> Hubert Cancik suggests that the Delphic oracle no longer has a religious or moral but primarily a psychological and even existential meaning for Ovid.<sup>54</sup> This raises the intriguing question: can Narcissus gain *humanitas* and become a mature person if he is not supposed to come to know himself? The complex answer to this problem seems to lie in the *genus novitasque furoris*.

While self-knowledge is desirable in general, the strangeness (*novitas*) of passionate (incestuous) desire (*furor*), which plagues Narcissus, can be overwhelming and hard to cope with.<sup>55</sup> When Narcissus is sixteen years old, many young men and women desire him but, due to his beauty, Ovid tells us, there is such a manifest arrogance in his behavior that no one touches him--which has to be taken both literally and metaphorically. Later, Narcissus will be

---

<sup>53</sup> Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Erkenne Dich selbst" [1923], *Reden und Vorträge*, 2 vols., 4th ed. (1926; reprint, Dublin/Zürich: Weidmann, 1967), 1: 173.

<sup>54</sup> Cancik, 48. Also see Ovid, *Amores. Medicamina Faciei Femineae. Ars Amatoria. Remedia Amoris*, ed. E. J. Kenney (1961; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 160/Ovid, *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*, trans. J. H. Mozley, 2nd ed. (1929; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 101; abbreviated as Ov. Ars 2.501: "*cui sibi notus erit, solus sapienter amavit* [Only he who knows himself will love with wisdom]"--where the poet already created a unique link between the Delphic oracle and love.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Ov. *Met.* 2.31; OLD s. v. *novitas* 2b.1195. In 1935, Pfandl, 288 still believed that, although the Greeks were accustomed to the phenomenon of self-love (p. 296), this neurosis called narcissism is "unheilbar [incurable]."

"punished" for the rejection of all his lovers, when he himself becomes subjected to incestuous desire.

Critics of psychoanalytic literary criticism may frown upon the contention of the incestuous character of Narcissus' desire, but its very quality becomes symptomatic in the following passage of Ovid's text.<sup>56</sup> When Narcissus comes to a spring to quench his thirst after hunting, "another thirst," his incestuous desire, grows in him while he is drinking:

hic puer et studio venandi lassus et aestu  
 procubuit faciemque loci fontemque secutus,  
 415 dumque sitim sedare cupit, sitis altera crevit,  
 dumque bibit, visae conreptus imagine formae  
 spem sine corpore amat, corpus putat esse, quod unda  
 est.  
 adstupet ipse sibi vultuque inmotus eodem  
 haeret, ut e Pario formatum marmore signum.

Here the boy, tired from keen hunting and the heat,  
 had lain down, drawn there by the spring and by the  
 beauty of the place,  
 415 and while he wanted to relieve his thirst, another  
 thirst grew in him,  
 and while he drank, he saw a beautiful reflection and  
 was captivated,  
 he loved a hope without a body, and what he thought was  
 body was but water.  
 He was overwhelmed by himself and, unmoving and holding  
 the same expression,

---

<sup>56</sup> Often texts do not reveal too many points in which certain facts of a literary case become symptomatic; for example, Ovid's text features only one point in which Narcissus' incestuous desire is addressed. However, when a number of other signifiers match with the overall structure, it seems permissible to draw conclusions about those less obvious signifiers.



he was fixed there like a statue moulded out of Parian marble.<sup>57</sup>

The key words in this passage are "*sitis* [thirst]," "*imago* [image]," and "*e Pario formatum marmore signum* [a statue moulded out of Parian marble]." The last expression is clearly symptomatic of Narcissus' incestuous desire, which aims at wholeness and completion. Interestingly enough, Herman Melville and Thomas Mann use very similar phrases to express the incestuous desire of Captain Ahab and Gustav von Aschenbach respectively.

Before commenting on the phallic nature of the marble statue, I will discuss the motif of the hunt. Narcissus is described as tired from the hunt and the heat--which is another way of describing his desire. The young boy wants to rest at a spring to relieve his "thirst" or desire (not just for water). Then "another thirst" grew in Narcissus, Ovid says, but I would argue that Narcissus' intoxication with his mirror image expresses just another manifestation of the same "thirst," the same incestuous desire. Narcissus is captivated by his reflection, and I will discuss the boy's fascination with his mirror image after we have clarified the source of his obsession: incestuous desire. The marble statue, "hard as a rock," resembles the metaphor

---

<sup>57</sup> Ov. *Met.* 3.413-419/Hill, 109.

which is associated with the phallic symbol of incestuous desire.

Narcissus, captured by the "illusion of autonomy," does not possess any freedom while he is longing for the realization of his unconscious desire for his phallic mother. Critics of psychoanalysis may argue that Ovid's Narcissus never indicates that he is going to act out the plot structure of the Oedipus myth by killing his "father," i.e., the parent of the same sex, and sleeping with his "mother," i.e., the parent of the opposite sex, but this argument misses its point. Incest prohibition, the law par excellence in Lacan's sphere of the Symbolic (S), exists nevertheless, and the societies of this world have made sure that the rules prohibiting incestuous relationships are enforced at all times.

In connection with the augur's prophecy about Narcissus' life and fate, Ovid mentions the "*novitas furoris* [the strangeness of (Narcissus' incestuous) desire]." <sup>58</sup> What is disguised by Ovid's description of Narcissus' *furor* is the cause of the teenager's neurosis, i.e., his everlasting alienation and the doubts about his own identity as a result of his unfulfilled desire. Narcissus desired something

---

<sup>58</sup> Ov. *Met.* 3.350/Hill, 107. See OLD, 750 s. v. *furor* 3b for other examples of "passionate desire."

"strange," the phallic Mother, which he could not possibly obtain because of incest prohibition.

A post-Ovidian author spells out the deadly potential of Narcissus' desire very clearly. In his commentary on Statius' epic *Thebais*, Lactantius writes:

Narcissus venandi studiosus fuit. quo labore fatigatus venit ad fontem, ut restingueret sitim. speculo imaginem suam vidit et amavit, cum putaret alienam. et cum coepisset eius desiderio cottidie intabescere, in florem sui nominis est mutatus.

Narcissus was an eager hunter. Exhausted by the effort he arrived at the spring to quench his thirst. He saw his own image in the mirror of the spring and fell in love with it, since he thought it belonged to a stranger. And when he started to waste away day by day from desire he was transformed into a flower which bears his name.<sup>59</sup>

The prohibition, or *Tabu*, of an incestuous relationship with the *Totem*, or member of the same family, which Freud described in *Totem und Tabu* [*Totem and Taboo*] (1912-1913),<sup>60</sup> leaves any individual with everlasting feelings of unfulfilled desire, i.e. a desire that should never and, under normal circumstances, will never be fulfilled. From antiquity to modern times, in so-called primitive and the

---

<sup>59</sup> Lactantius, *Commentarii*, 3 vols., ed. Richard Jahnke (Leipzig: Teubner, 1898); 3: 362 on book 7.341/Vinge, 23.

<sup>60</sup> *GW* 9/*SE* 13.

most advanced societies, penalties for breaking the incest prohibition are severe, often calling for the death penalty. And even the adherence to the incest prohibition can have deadly consequences as the examples of Narcissus, Captain Ahab, and Gustav von Aschenbach will demonstrate.

To understand the full meaning of the myth of Narcissus, one has to move one step further in Lacan's Schéma L, from the unfulfilled incestuous desire in the sphere of the Real (R) to the narcissistic identification in the imaginary sphere (I). As a result of one universal law, the prohibition of incestuous desire, the human subject seeks satisfaction elsewhere and finds a new aim in an imaginary object from the mirror stage on. The substitution or displacement marks the change from incestuous to narcissistic desire. The child identifies with an image or other (*autre*), a process which has been described by Lacan as narcissistic or imaginary identification. In this imaginary relationship (*relation imaginaire*), the image of the other (*autre*) can be either the child's own mirror image or the image of any other close person such as a parent or a sibling.

Ovid first introduces the phenomenon of narcissistic identification in connection with the nymph Echo. It is not Narcissus but Echo who identifies in a narcissistic manner with Narcissus. While Narcissus is hunting, the nymph Echo notices him and falls in love with the teenager. Echo, who

at this point still has a body and is not yet a voice only, has been punished by Juno because she helped Jupiter to conceal his love affairs. As a result, Echo is only permitted to repeat someone else's words. Often Echo wants to approach Narcissus with soothing words but her condition only allows her to repeat words.

Hence, Klaus Schlagmann points out that Narcissus did not reject Echo's love because as an echo she was not able to love him in the "true" sense of the word: "*Da ist nichts eigenes des Gegenübers, was man wertschätzen könnte, es gibt nur Echo!* [There is nothing of a partner one could hold in high esteem, there is only Echo]." <sup>61</sup> Ovid says:

360 corpus adhuc Echo, non vox erat; et tamen usum  
garrula non alium, quam nunc habet, oris habebat,  
reddere de multis ut verba novissima posset.

Echo was still a body, not a voice; and yet the  
chatterbox  
360 had no other use for her mouth than she has now,

---

<sup>61</sup> Schlagmann, 40-41. As Professor Edgeworth informs me, the echo episode both prefigures and contrasts with the pool episode: in the echo episode, Narcissus cannot recognize that what he hears is the reflexion of himself; in the pool episode, it is what Narcissus sees that he fails to recognize. However, while Narcissus flees union in the echo episode, he seeks it the pool episode. Narcissus' different reactions in similar scenarios point to a lack of self-knowledge. But neither the postponement of an imaginary identification in the echo episode grants a resolution, nor does lethal imaginary identification in the pool episode.

that she could return the very last words out of  
many.<sup>62</sup>

By the time Echo encounters Narcissus, she is only able to repeat what she has heard. Echo could not love in the real sense of the word, Schlagmann argues, because she is no longer a person but only an echo.

Lacan, in contrast, subscribes to a view of love which has the human subject in the state of "love" do nothing but admire just an image or *Ichideal*. In Lacan's pessimistic view of love, dialog as an integral part of any human relationship is impossible. Lacan would probably agree with Schlagmann that Narcissus' decision not to have a relationship with Echo does not necessarily imply that he is more "narcissitically impaired" than anybody else, or that he rejects any relationship in general. Narcissus' rejection of Echo only indicates that he can not identify sufficiently with the image of Echo to reciprocate her love.

In the course of his youth, Narcissus deluded other nymphs and young men until one of those prays that he himself may love too and not gain the loved one. The following account illustrates an etiological explanation of Narcissus' imaginary identification. In a brief interlude, Nemesis, the goddess of vengeance, assents to the prayer of

---

<sup>62</sup> Ov. *Met.* 3.344-345/Hill, 107.

one of Narcissus' rejected lovers; *she*--the myth tells us--makes Narcissus fall in love with his mirror image.

Narcissistic identification as part of the narcissistic structure of the human subject represents the universal phenomenon which is disguised in the myth of Narcissus. Considering narcissistic identification as potentially affecting everybody's life, Jacques Lacan returns to one of the premises of Freud's essay "On Narcissism," namely that narcissism has its place in the *regular* course of human (sexual) development, and that narcissism can be attributed to every living creature. Narcissistic identification finds its victims in young Narcissus but also in mature Captain Ahab and Gustav von Aschenbach.

In his narcissistic identification, Narcissus is only pursuing his own reflected image. Even before Narcissus is captivated by his mirror image, with which he narcissistically identifies,<sup>63</sup> his incestuous desire has been displaced when the teenage boy was driving nervous stags into nets.<sup>64</sup> Peter Schellenbaum is mistaken when he assumes

---

<sup>63</sup> Ov. Met. 1.415-417/Hill, 113.

<sup>64</sup> Ov. Met. 1.356-358/Hill, 107:

adspicit hunc trepidos agitantem in retia cervos  
vocalis nympe, quae nec reticere loquenti  
nec prius ipsa loqui didicit, resonabilis Echo.

As he was driving nervous stags into the nets, he was  
noticed  
by a talkative nymph who had learnt neither to keep silent

that Narcissus' life was entirely happy until he became a hunter.<sup>65</sup> First, the young man's search is by no means instinctual but culturally informed through the incest prohibition; second, the hunt is not just a motif in myth and fairy-tale but a phenomenon which, among other things, symbolizes man's general symptom: the search for an image as a substitute for the phallic Mother.

Ovid describes the young boy as ignorant of his incestuous desire (*cupit imprudens*). Unsuccessfully, Narcissus often gives kisses to the deceptive spring, often he plunges his arms into the waters but cannot grasp himself there. At this point, which is typical for the mirror stage, Narcissus does not know what he is seeing but in his confusion he is very excited:

430 quid videat, nescit, sed quod videt, uritur illo  
atque oculos idem, qui decipit, incitat error.

430 He did not know what he was seeing, but he was on fire  
at what he saw,

---

for a speaker nor to speak first herself, she was sound  
repeating Echo.

<sup>65</sup> Peter Schellenbaum, *Das Nein in der Liebe: Abgrenzung und Hingabe in der erotischen Beziehung*, 7th ed. (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1984; reprint, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1990), 39: "Die verhängnisvolle Wende im Leben des bisher glücklichen jungen Mannes Narkissos beginnt damit, daß er sich auf die Hirschjagd begibt. Diese ist ein in Mythos und Märchen weitverbreitetes Motiv, das die instinktive Suche des Jugendlichen nach der eigenen autonomen 'Männlichkeit' ausdrückt [The fatal turn in the life of young Narcissus, who had been happy until then, happens when he started hunting deer. The hunt marks a common motif in myth and fairy-tale which expresses the youth's instinctive search for his own autonomy]."



and his eyes were thrilled and misled by the same  
confusion.<sup>66</sup>

Neither hunger nor weariness can drag Narcissus away  
from the spring but he gazes at the deceiving image with an  
unfulfilled gaze and is destroyed by his own eyes:

spectat inexpleto mendacem lumine formam  
440 perque oculos perit ipse suos;

he gazed at the deceiving image with an insatiable  
gaze  
440 and by his own eyes he was himself undone;<sup>67</sup>

Because of the incest prohibition, Narcissus' desire for  
completion in the realm of the Real (R) will always be  
unfulfilled; his longing for an ersatz image in the realm of  
the Imaginary (I) is insatiable. But since Narcissus cannot  
find what he is looking for, since the young boy will never  
be able to become one with his mirror image, he is only  
confused. The deadly potential of the Symbolic (S) is also  
spelled out here: Narcissus' obsession with his image will  
kill him eventually. In his despair, Narcissus keeps  
turning back to address the deceiving image. After  
realizing that he pursues his mirror image, Narcissus wishes  
that he could withdraw from his body to unite with this

---

<sup>66</sup> Ov. Met. 3.430-431/Hill, 111.

<sup>67</sup> Ov. Met. 3.439-440/Hill, 111.

image. The recognition of and the pain over the impossibility of his wish takes Narcissus' strength away. Death is no burden for him, Narcissus claims, for death will take away the pain of his (incestuous) desire: "*nec mihi mors gravis est, posituro morte dolores* [Death is no burden for me, for in death I shall lay aside this pain]."<sup>68</sup> When he sees his image disappear because of his tears disturbing the waters, Narcissus despairingly cries:

'quo refugis? remane nec me, crudelis, amantem  
desere!' clamavit; 'liceat, quod tangere non est,  
adspicere et misero praeberere alimenta furori!'

'Where are you fleeing to? Stay, do not, cruel one,  
abandon me,  
your lover,' he cried, 'and let me gaze on what I may  
not  
touch, and so give nourishment to my unhappy  
passion.'<sup>69</sup>

Ovid is not very explicit about Narcissus' metamorphosis into a flower, the poet only says that after beating his bare breast, the young boy melts away in love and is slowly consumed by his passionate desire. Since gods do not cause Narcissus' transformation, it seems reasonable to identify his death as suicide. However, not every

---

<sup>68</sup> Ov. Met. 3.471/Hill, 113.

<sup>69</sup> Ov. Met. 3.477-479/Hill, 113.

metamorphosis in Ovid's work should be equated with suicide, nor are metamorphoses in general always bad or undesirable.

Ovid's story of Narcissus does not capitalize on the change from incestuous desire (Oedipus) to narcissistic desire (Narcissus), but the prohibition of the incestuously desired object seems to be the reason for man's aggressivity: Narcissus is beating his bare breast. According to Lacan, aggressivity "is the correlative tendency of a mode of identification that we call narcissistic."<sup>70</sup> In Greek myth, Oedipus' change from orphan son into Father killer is just as murderous and violent as Narcissus' less spectacular suicide which is disguised as a change from orphan son into a flower. In the end, Narcissus' body, which Echo once loved, is no more.

Ovid's final comment on Narcissus' suicide reveals the intensity of his passionate desire. What may strike the reader as a humorous or mocking remark by Ovid in the last few lines of his account of the myth of Narcissus only confirms Lacan's assumption that incestuous desire will never be fulfilled. After Narcissus had been metamorphosed into the flower that is associated with his name, his soul is said to have been received by the realm of the underworld. Even at this point, Narcissus would attempt to

---

<sup>70</sup> E, 16.

identify with his mirror image by gazing upon himself in the water of the river Styx.

#### IV. CAPTAIN AHAB'S NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN HERMAN MELVILLE'S *MOBY-DICK*

And still deeper the meaning of that story of Narcissus, who because he could not grasp the tormenting, mild image he saw in the fountain, plunged into it and was drowned. But that same image, we ourselves see in all rivers and oceans. It is the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.<sup>1</sup>

These are the words with which Herman Melville has the sailor Ishmael reflect upon a universal human phenomenon in the first chapter of *Moby-Dick* (1851). Melville's novel about the white whale provides an example of a modern literary text which represents the narcissistic structure of human beings in the figure of Captain Ahab. A psychoanalytic reading of *Moby-Dick* as a literary case reveals that the narcissistic structure is the law with which the novel corresponds. The narcissistic structure of *Moby-Dick*, then, is the key to the elusiveness of Melville's sea world, "the key to it all."

Without success, Captain Ahab attempts to solve this riddle until he self-destructs in his chase of the white whale. In a spiritual gathering, Ahab solves the puzzle without understanding its meaning. Standing erect before the lofty tri-pointed trinity of flames, Ahab has the

---

<sup>1</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 5.

following insight when staring into the fire: "Look up at it; mark it well; the white flame but lights the way to the White Whale!"<sup>2</sup> The "clear spirit of clear fire" directs Ahab into the realm of the Real (R), to the white whale, and to his own "flaming self," his "foundling fire," or, in psychoanalytic terms, his (incestuous) desire. Looking into the burning flames, Ahab realizes: "But thou art my fiery father; my sweet mother, I know not. Oh, cruel! what hast thou done with her? There lies my puzzle."<sup>3</sup> The riddle, however, remains "incommunicable" for Ahab who is obsessed--that is his symptom ( $\Sigma$ )--by his hunt for Moby Dick: "All your oaths to hunt the White Whale are as binding as mine; and heart, soul, and body, lungs and life, old Ahab is bound."<sup>4</sup>

In Ahab's narcissistic structure, the subject, Ahab, is submitted to the image of the white whale (other) in an imaginary relation. Ahab's assumption, or imaginary identification, is that by pursuing that image he can grasp the white whale, which is also a signifier in the ungraspable realm of the Real (R). Whenever a subject attempts to attain an object in an imaginary relationship--a

---

<sup>2</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 507.

<sup>3</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 508; also see *Moby-Dick*, 562 on Ahab's relentless but unsuccessful attempt to solve the "riddle."

<sup>4</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 508.

suicidal tendency—Freud's death drive and Lacan's law of the dead father become apparent.

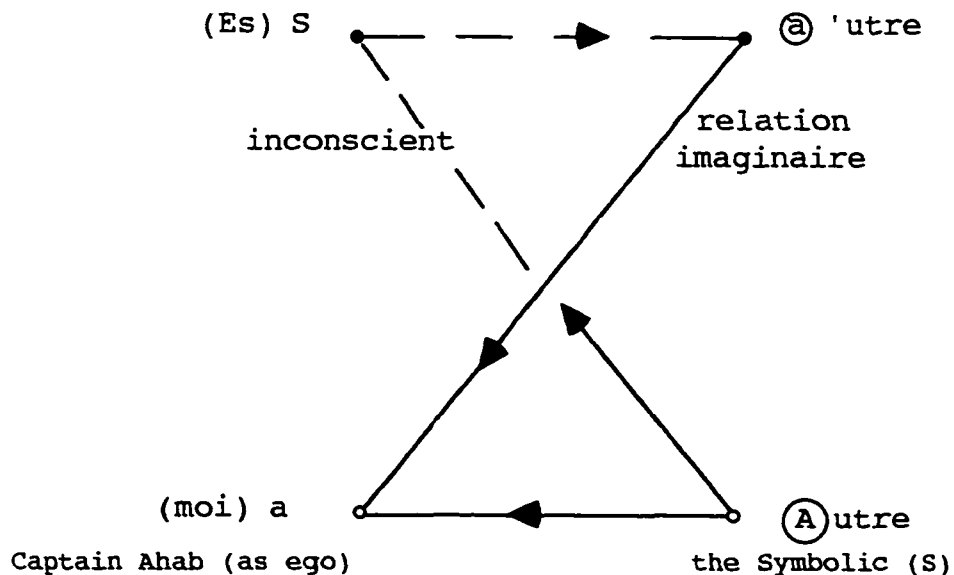
Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* coincides with the structure of the Narcissus theme in many ways. The narcissistic structure of Captain Ahab, for instance, is most prominent throughout the novel, and this structure becomes symptomatic through a number of signifiers. The first of a series of signifiers is spelled out by the sailor Ishmael in chapter one: "We ourselves," i.e., we all, including the reader, "see in all rivers and oceans . . . the image of the ungraspable phantom of life." The notion of the ungraspable image, which resembles Narcissus' mirror image in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, introduces the quest for the ungraspable, i.e., Lacan's Real (R), which coincides with Freud's unconscious (ucs).

Ahab's desire for "the ungraspable phantom of life" corresponds with his desire to grasp the phantom of the white whale which has been haunting his life, and to retrieve his leg. Catching Moby Dick and retrieving his integrity prove to be two impossible tasks which can only end in Ahab's self-destruction. The following list of signifiers captures those points in which Ahab's desire becomes symptomatic in the realm of the Real (R).

the white whale/Moby Dick  
 "the ungraspable phantom of life" (*Moby-Dick*, 5)  
 "the ineffable thing" (169)

"mystical, ineffable whiteness of the whale" (188)  
 "an elusive something" (189)  
 (incestuous) desire  
 "an everlasting itch for things remote" (7)  
 the (phallic) mother  
 "forbidden seas" (7)  
 "There she [Moby Dick] blows" (215)  
 "an everlasting terra incognita" (273)  
 "Like a marble sepulchre" (308)  
 "this mighty tail, . . . my inability to express it" (378)  
 Ahab's (living) dismasted leg  
 the Real (R)

the Imaginary (I)



Desire, located in the realm of the Real (R) in Lacan's Schéma L, proves to be so powerful and all-encompassing that it affects not just Ahab but also the rest of the crew. In chapter 99 on the doubloon, Ahab reflects: "There is something ever egotistical in mountain-tops and towers, and all other grand and lofty things; look here,--three peaks as proud as Lucifer. The firm tower, that is Ahab; the volcano, that is Ahab; the outrageous, the undaunted, and victorious fowl, that, too, is Ahab; all are Ahab; and this



round gold is but the image of a rounder globe, which, like a magician's glass, to each and every man in turn but mirrors back his own mysterious self. Great pains, small gains for those who ask the world to solve them."<sup>5</sup> "There's another rendering now; but still one text," Stubbs notes, "[a]ll sorts of men in one kind of world."<sup>6</sup> And Starbuck concedes that "the ineffable thing has tied me to him."<sup>7</sup> The fact that Starbuck fails to express himself points to the unconscious sphere of the Real (R). The unconscious marks the field in which common language stops short against a kernel of meaning that cannot be formalized because, as Lacan said, "there is no way to say it all."

Ahab's desire is characterized as "the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies which some deep men feel eating in them, till they are left living on with half a heart and half a lung."<sup>8</sup> Even before *Moby Dick* had reaped Ahab's leg, the white whale resembled the one and only object that could satisfy Ahab's monomania, as the narrator explains: "It is not probable that this monomania in him took its instant rise at the precise time of his

---

<sup>5</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 431.

<sup>6</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 434.

<sup>7</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 169.

<sup>8</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 184.

bodily dismemberment."<sup>9</sup> But after the captain "had dashed at the whale, as an Arkansas duellist at his foe, blindly seeking with a six inch blade to reach the fathom-deep life of the whale,"<sup>10</sup> and after Moby Dick had taken Ahab's leg, the "final" monomania seized Ahab--again suggesting that the very same desire drove him even before he lost his leg.

Apart from Ahab's desire, which belongs to an ungraspable sphere, the example of Ishmael also confirms that the desire "for things remote" is of universal nature, and does not have to spring from a missing leg. Ishmael's "everlasting itch" resembles modern people's focus on a desired object. In a footnote added in 1910 to *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* [*Three Essays on Sexuality*] (1905), Freud argues that, in modern times, a shift has taken place from emphasizing desire itself in antiquity to focusing on the object of desire.<sup>11</sup> But regardless of the

---

<sup>9</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 184. From chapter 41 on, Melville uses the noun "monomania" four times and the adjective "monomaniac" close to a dozen times in connection, and only in connection, with Ahab, as Eugene F. Irey, *A Concordance to Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*, 2 vols. (New York: Garland, 1982), 1: 1029 documents.

<sup>10</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 184.

<sup>11</sup> *GW*, 5: 48 note 1/SE, 7: 149 note 1: "Der eingreifendste Unterschied zwischen dem Liebesleben der Alten Welt und dem unsrigen liegt wohl darin, daß die Antike den Akzent auf den Trieb selbst, wir aber auf dessen Objekt verlegen. Die Alten feierten den Trieb und waren bereit, auch ein minderwertiges Objekt durch ihn zu adeln, während wir die Triebbetätigung an sich geringschätzen und sie nur durch die Vorzüge des Objekts entschuldigen lassen [The most striking distinction between the erotic life of antiquity and our own no doubt lies in the fact that the ancients laid the stress upon the instinct [should read: drive], whereas we emphasize its object. The ancients glorified the

focus of one's desire, the human race, in our times as well as in antiquity, has been "tormented with an everlasting itch" because one's desire "for things remote," for the symbolic phallic Mother, cannot be fulfilled.

Admitting that "Ahab's quenchless feud" seemed his own, Ishmael mentions his love for "forbidden seas" among the motives to have him and the sailors of the *Pequod* join the whaling voyage:

Such a portentous and mysterious monster roused all my curiosity. Then the wild and distant seas where he rolled his island bulk; the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale; these, with all the attending marvels of a thousand Patagonian sights and sounds, helped to sway me to my wish. With other men, perhaps, such a thing would not have been inducements; but as for me, I am tormented with an everlasting itch for things remote. I love to sail forbidden seas, and land on barbarous coasts.<sup>12</sup>

Again, Ishmael's remark about "the undeliverable, nameless perils of the whale" underscores that the very whale from which Melville's novel draws its name can hardly be described in common language; the white whale's perils are "nameless." Hence, the white whale constitutes part of the ungraspable and must be placed in the realm of the unconscious. Not even all of the sperm whale fishermen know

---

instinct [drive] and were prepared on its account to honour even an inferior object; while we despise the instinctual [driven] activity in itself, and find excuses for it only in the merit of the object]."

<sup>12</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 7.

of the white whale's existence, "the number who as yet had actually and knowingly given battle to him, was small indeed."<sup>13</sup>

Located in the realm of the Real (R), Moby Dick, "fatal to the last degree of fatality" and frequenting the "remotest waters," proves to be "a consternation to every other creature in the sea, but also to be so incredibly ferocious as continually to be athirst for human blood."<sup>14</sup> In chapter 58, the narrator points out that "we know the sea to be an everlasting terra incognita." The most terrific of all mortal disasters are associated with waters because "for ever and for ever, to the crack of doom, the sea will insult and murder."<sup>15</sup> A few of the fishermen refuse to chase Moby Dick--in the realm of the Imaginary (I)--because to "point lance at such an apparition as the Sperm Whale was not for mortal man." To attempt it "would be inevitably to be torn into quick eternity."<sup>16</sup> The reference to Moby Dick's

---

<sup>13</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 179.

<sup>14</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 181. During the first day of the chase, the tremendous apparition of Moby Dick yawned "like an open-doored marble tomb" (p. 549), and on the second day of the chase, the white whale "seemed only intent on annihilating" (p. 558).

<sup>15</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 273.

<sup>16</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 182. The incestuous nature of the quest also becomes apparent when the narrator compares Tashtego's death "in the very whitest and daintiest of fragrant spermaceti; coffined, hearsed, and tombed in the secret inner chamber and sanctum sanctorum of the whale" to "the delicious death of an Ohio honey-hunter, who seeking honey in the crotch of a hollow tree, found such exceeding store of it, that

deadliness confirms the suicidal aspect of Ahab's desire which overlaps with his death drive--to employ a Freudian term, or Lacan's name-of-the-father.

Moby Dick, "immortal in his species, however perishable in his individuality," is also referred to as "ubiquitous" and as having been "encountered in opposite latitudes at one and the same instant of time . . . ; so the hidden ways of the Sperm Whale when beneath the surface remain, in great part, unaccountable to his pursuers."<sup>17</sup> "[T]he spermaceti whale obtains his whole food in unknown zones below the surface."<sup>18</sup> Moby Dick's sexual identity also confuses his or her pursuers because the white whale is both male and female, both phallic and Mother. "There she blows!" the excited crew exclaims upon the sight of Moby Dick.<sup>19</sup> The whale's tail looms straight up, "perpendicular in the air, like a marble steeple."<sup>20</sup> Adding to this confusion of clear gendering, the narrator speaks of the traditionally female realm of the waters as "the masculine sea."<sup>21</sup>

---

leaning too far over, it sucked him in, so that he died embalmed" (p. 344).

<sup>17</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 462. 182.

<sup>18</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 277.

<sup>19</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 215.

<sup>20</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 438-439.

<sup>21</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 542.

Ishmael concludes his account of chapter 41 on Moby Dick by conceding that "what the White Whale was to [the crew], or how to their unconscious understandings, also, in some dim, unsuspected way, he might have seemed the gliding great demon of the seas of life,--all this to explain, would be to dive deeper than Ishmael can go."<sup>22</sup> The whale, which is described as "the deadliest ill" causing "instantaneous death," remains "the ungraspable phantom of life," the phallic Mother of demonic quality, in the sphere of the Real (R) that cannot be fully captured with words: "The more I consider this mighty tail, the more I deplore my inability to express it. At times there are gestures in it, which, though they would well grace the hand of man, remain wholly inexplicable."<sup>23</sup> Ishmael, the narrator, concludes that he will never know the white whale because he cannot possibly understand his own head if he does not even know the tail of this whale.

The whiteness of the whale functions as another signifier locating the white whale in a sphere which cannot be grasped. Melville has devoted an entire chapter, number 42, to "The Whiteness of the Whale" which is significant because, as Ishmael informs the reader in chapter 32 on

---

<sup>22</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 187.

<sup>23</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 378.

"cetology, or the science of whales," "blackness is the rule among almost all whales."<sup>24</sup>

What the white whale was to Ahab, has been hinted; what, at times, he was to me, as yet remains unsaid.

Aside from those more obvious considerations touching Moby Dick, which could not but occasionally awaken in any man's soul some alarm, there was another thought, or rather vague, nameless horror concerning him, which at times by its intensity completely overpowered all the rest; and yet so mystical and well nigh ineffable was it, that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form. It was the whiteness of the whale that above all things appalled me.<sup>25</sup>

In this passage, a number of symptomatic points, namely "as yet remains unsaid," "so mystical and well nigh ineffable," and "that I almost despair of putting it in a comprehensible form," reinforce the conclusion that the white whale resides in the unspeakable sphere of the unconscious. Making a comparison to the whiteness of a noble horse, Ishmael concedes "that it was his spiritual whiteness chiefly, which so clothed him with divineness; and that this divineness had that in it which, though commanding worship, at the same time enforced a certain nameless terror."<sup>26</sup>

The whale's whiteness enforces a certain nameless terror because, belonging to the sphere of the unconscious,

---

<sup>24</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 141.

<sup>25</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 188.

<sup>26</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 191.

whiteness, "the one visible quality in the aspect of the dead," is not accessible, cannot be grasped. "[No] man can deny that in its profoundest idealized significance [whiteness] calls up a peculiar apparition of the soul," Ishmael concludes answering the question of accounting for whiteness: "To analyse it, would seem impossible."<sup>27</sup> And the phallic and deadly nature of the white whale also places this white mass into the realm of the Real (R): "The peeled white body of the beheaded whale flashes like a marble sepulchre."<sup>28</sup>

Despite some positive connotations<sup>29</sup> with whiteness, "there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than the redness which affrights in blood."<sup>30</sup> "[W]hiteness . . . enforce[s] a certain nameless terror . . . the shrouded phantom of the whitened waters is horrible to him as a real ghost."<sup>31</sup> After *Moby Dick* has annihilated Captain Ahab in the last chapter, "a sullen white surf beat against [the ship's] steep sides; then all collapsed, and the great

---

<sup>27</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 192.

<sup>28</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 308.

<sup>29</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 428: "The unmanufactured sperm oil possesses a singularly cleansing virtue. This is the reason why the decks never look so white as just after what they call an affair of oil."

<sup>30</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 189.

<sup>31</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 191-193.



shroud of the sea rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago."<sup>32</sup>

"[W]hiteness . . . appeals with such power to the soul . . . it is at once the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity."<sup>33</sup> The opposing signifiers of the "white whale (Moby Dick)" and "other (black) whales" support a juxtaposition which puts the white whale into an ungraspable, "divine" sphere of the Real (R)--and yet Ahab and his crew try to hunt down the image of the white whale in the sphere of the Imaginary (I):<sup>34</sup>

For all these reasons, then, any way you may look at it, you must needs conclude that the great Leviathan is that one creature in the world which must remain unpainted to the last. . . . So there is no earthly way of finding out precisely what the whale really looks like. And the only mode in which you can derive even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a whaling yourself; but by doing so, you run no small risk of being eternally stove and sunk by him.<sup>35</sup>

The group of sperm whales, to which the white whale Moby Dick belongs, has been classified as being of "immense

---

<sup>32</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 572.

<sup>33</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 195.

<sup>34</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 548. Also see page 346 about "the great Sperm Whale, this high and mighty god-like dignity."

<sup>35</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 264. Cf. 346: "For you see no point precisely, not one distinct feature is revealed."

superiority, . . . of pervading dignity."<sup>36</sup> Ishmael's description of the sperm oil, "the highly-prized spermaceti, in its absolutely pure, limpid, odoriferous state," which is won by killing sperm whales, confirms the species sperm whale to be larger than life.<sup>37</sup> For the only kind of oil that lends "totality" and dignity to coronations is the sperm oil.<sup>38</sup> Ishmael even claims to have seen "long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti."<sup>39</sup> "No wonder that in old times this sperm was such a favorite cosmetic. Such a clearer! such a sweetener! such a softener! such a delicious mollifier!"<sup>40</sup> But while the spermaceti makes everybody happy, it remains a risky business to win the sperm oil. The sailors pursue the sperm oil as a graspable substance in the realm of the Imaginary (I) but the oil also signifies something divine in the realm of the Real (R) which they will never reach.

Some sailors lose an arm or a leg over it. Ahab's (living) leg constitutes another signifier in the sphere of the Real (R). His ivory leg, in contrast, is the part Ahab can identify with in the imaginary sphere but it is not the

---

<sup>36</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 329.

<sup>37</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 340.

<sup>38</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 416.

<sup>40</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 415.

"real" thing. Significantly, Ahab's ivory leg, which had already served as a substitute for his living leg, has to be replaced again in chapter 106 after it appeared to be substantially damaged.

It was Moby Dick that "dismasted" Captain Ahab. This symbolic castration increased Ahab's determination to compensate for his symbolic impotence and achieve completeness by killing the image of the white whale. Even though the killing of Moby Dick will not make Ahab feel complete--because our (incestuous) desire can never be fulfilled--, the captain vicariously identifies with the narcissistically imagined object of his desire and mission of hunting down the whale.

Ahab never understands the universality of his desire; at some point he has just displaced by narcissistic identification the Mother as forbidden object of desire with "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life," the white whale Moby-Dick, which seems to be attainable:

Ahab would mutter to himself, as after poring over his charts till long after midnight he would throw himself back in reveries--tallied him, and shall he escape? . . . And here, his mad mind would run on in a breathless race; till a weariness and faintness of pondering came over him; and in the open air of the deck he would seek to recover his strength. Ah, god! what trances of torments does that man endure who is consumed with one unachieved revengeful desire. He

sleeps with clenched hands; and wakes with his own bloody nails in his palms.<sup>41</sup>

Since Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*, dream images have been perceived as those instances through which the human subject comes closest to the realm of the unconscious.

In Ahab's dream, "these spiritual throes in him," this hell in himself" form "the unsurpressable symptoms of some latent weakness, . . . the plainest tokens of its intensity."<sup>42</sup> Envisioning Freud's principles of the dream work, Melville writes "this Ahab that had gone to his hammock, was not the agent that so caused him to burst from it in horror again. The latter was the eternal, living principle or soul in him; and in sleep, being for the time dissociated from the characterizing mind, which at other times employed it for its outer vehicle or agent, it spontaneously sought escape from the scorching contiguity of the frantic thing, of which for the time, it was no longer an integral."<sup>43</sup> In such a moment, the symptom of Ahab's narcissistic structure, his scheming as unappeasably steadfast hunter of Moby Dick, surfaces and forces itself into existence as an independent being of its own. The free

---

<sup>41</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 201.

<sup>42</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 202.

<sup>43</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 202.

will of the human subject yields to the much stronger will of the subject's symptom, i.e., in Ahab's case, his obsession with the whale hunt.

Reflecting upon the circumstances and motives that induce him to join the whaling voyage, Ishmael admits that he has cajoled himself into "the delusion that it was a choice resulting from [his] own unbiased freewill and discriminating judgment."<sup>44</sup> Most of our decisions are made unconsciously, influenced by rules, ideas, or history, Lacan's Symbolic (S), and Freud's superego: "All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters around their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever-present perils of life. And if you be a philosopher, though seated in the whale-boat, you would not at heart feel one whit more of terror, than though seated before your evening fire with a poker, and not a harpoon, by your side."<sup>45</sup>

In a state of "dreaminess," i.e., in a state that reveals some access to the unconscious, Ishmael ponders the working together of one's chance, free will, and necessity: "The straight warp of necessity, not to be swerved from its ultimate course--its every alternating vibration, indeed,

---

<sup>44</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 281.

only tending to that; free will still free to ply her shuttle between given threads; and chance, though restrained in its play within the right lines of necessity, and sideways in its motions modified by free will, though thus prescribed to by both, chance by turns rules either, and has the last featuring blow at events."<sup>46</sup> Ahab later wonders about some invisible power that makes people act like puppets: "What is it, what nameless, inscrutable, unearthly thing is it; what cozening hidden lord and master, and cruel, remorseless emperor commands me? . . . By heaven, man, we are turned round and round in this world, like yonder windlass, and Fate is the handspike."<sup>47</sup> "The hand of Fate had snatched all their souls," the narrator says later when the whole crew is overcome by incestuous desire--because that is the less mystical, appropriate Lacanian term.

The following list of signifiers captures those points in which the Name-of-the-Father or law of incest prohibition becomes symptomatic in the realm of the Autre (A) or Symbolic (S):

castration  
 Ahab's rod-like birth-mark (124)  
 Ahab's ivory leg  
 "dead limb like a coffin-tap"  
 (233)

---

<sup>46</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 215.

<sup>47</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 545.

"a stick of a whale's jaw-bone for  
a wife" (472)  
language  
the Symbolic (S)

In Lacan's Schéma L [see graphic on page 135], the origin of one's "everlasting itch for things remote," and one's desire for the "ungraspable phantom of life" lies in the sphere of the Other, Lacan's Autre (A). Ahab's relentless attempts to hunt down his object of desire, the white whale, are again grounded in the castration complex. According to Lacan, we are all castrated because we speak. In other words, our phallic desire can never be fulfilled because the object of our desire is already represented as a signifier; our object of desire does not exist in the realm of the Real (R) but can only seek a substitute in the realm of the Imaginary (I). Sometimes the object of desire seems to be a real person, for instance, Tadzio in the next chapter, but more often desire aims at certain aspects of an image, as the examples of Narcissus and Captain Ahab demonstrate.

"The castration complex," as Laplanche and Pontalis define it, "has to be understood in terms of the cultural order, where the right to a particular practice is invariably associated with a prohibition. The 'threat of castration' which sets the seal on the prohibition against incest is the embodiment of the Law that founds the human

.

order."<sup>48</sup> The incompatibility of (incestuous) desire with our repressive cultural reality leaves every human being with a permanent injury to one's self-esteem.

Freud's symbolic "narcissistic scar," a common neurotic ailment, is very visible, even at the physical level, in the form of a mark on Captain Ahab's face:

There seemed no sign of common bodily illness about him, nor of the recovery from any. He looked like a man cut away from the stake, when the fire has overrunningly wasted all the limbs without consuming them, or taking away one particle from their compacted aged robustness. His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus. Threading its way out from among his grey hairs, and continuing right down one side of his tawny scorched face and neck, till it disappeared in his clothing, you saw a slender rod-like mark, lividly whitish. It resembled that perpendicular seam sometimes made in the straight, lofty trunk of a great tree, when the upper lightning tearingly darts down it, and without wrenching a single twig, peels and grooves out the bark from top to bottom, ere running off into soil, leaving the tree still greenly alive, but branded. Whether the mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say. By some tacit consent, throughout the voyage little or no allusion was made to it, especially by the mates. But once Tashtego's senior, an old Gay-Head Indian among the crew, superstitiously asserted that not till he was full forty years old did Ahab become that way branded, and then it came upon him, not in the fury of any mortal fray, but in an element strife at sea. Yet, this wild hint seemed inferentially negatived, by what a grey Manxman insinuated, an old sepulchral man, who, having never before sailed out of Nantucket, had never ere this laid eye upon wild Ahab. Nevertheless, the

---

<sup>48</sup> Laplanche and Pontalis, 59. Freud's mythical theory of the primal father has been transformed by Lacan into the symbolic level of the law of the dead father.



old sea-traditions, the immemorial credulities, popularly invested this old Manxman with preternatural powers of discernment. So that no white sailor seriously contradicted him when he said that if ever Captain Ahab should be tranquilly laid out--which might hardly come to pass, so he muttered--then, whoever should do that last office for the dead, would find a birth-mark on him from crown to sole.<sup>49</sup>

Ahab's "rod-like mark, lively whitish" deserves to be commented upon. This "rod-like mark" functions as a signifier both in the fields of the Symbolic (S) and the Real (R). "Whether the mark was born with him, or whether it was the scar left by some desperate wound, no one could certainly say," the narrator says. Later, however, we learn that this mark has been a part of humanity and even the gods from the beginning (of culture): "To trail the genealogies of these high mortal miseries, carries us at least among the sourceless primogenitures of the gods; so that, in face of all the glad, hay-making suns, and soft-cymballing, round harvest-moons, we must needs give in to this: that the gods themselves are not for ever glad. The ineffaceable, sad birth-mark in the brow of man, is but the stamp of sorrow in the signers."<sup>50</sup> The human race is marked from birth on, not by some biological mark, but by the mark of culture, i.e., the incest prohibition. All human beings are subject to the

---

<sup>49</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 123-124.

<sup>50</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 464.

law of language which symbolically puts "the real thing" into the realm of the Real (R), which cannot be fully grasped by any human subject. In this sense, Ahab's mark is indicative of incest prohibition, of the phallic Mother in the realm of the Real (R), which cannot be reached.

At the same time, the "rod-like mark" functions as a signifier of phallic quality. Ahab's whole body, "shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus," resembles a phallic statue. The ambivalent interdependence of castration and desire also manifests itself in the difference between Ahab's healthy and his ivory leg: "While his one live leg made lively echoes along the deck, every stroke of his dead limb sounded like a coffin-tap."<sup>51</sup> And even with Ahab's ivory leg the ambivalence persists.

On the one hand, his "dismasted" ivory leg, which is now detachable from his body, functions as another signifier of mutilation, and symbolizes castration in the realm of the Symbolic (S). Moby Dick takes Ahab's leg, leaving the captain physically castrated. The ivory leg obviously is a substitute, hence indicating Ahab's castration. The quest of the white whale as the result of (Ahab's) castration (by the whale) marks the quest of the phallic Mother. The chase of the white whale forms the law of the boat that drives the whole crew.

---

<sup>51</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 233.

On the other hand, Ahab's ivory leg symbolizes desire in the realm of the Real (R). "[N]ot a little of his overbearing grimness was owing to the barbaric white leg upon which he partly stood. It had previously come to me that this ivory leg had at sea been fashioned from the polished bone of the sperm whale's jaw."<sup>52</sup> As observed above, the very material of Ahab's leg, made from white whalebone, a signifier in the realm of the Real (R), points to this sphere. The brief passage describing Ahab's ivory leg is filled with sexual connotations, all of which symbolize Ahab's castration.

Furthermore, the "sperm whale" signifies the phallic mother who is both the aim of Ahab's desire and beyond representation; therefore, the hunt for the phallic mother is replaced by the hunt for the white whale. As the carpenter notices: "Yes, now that I think of it, here's his bedfellow! has a stick of whale's jaw-bone for a wife!"<sup>53</sup> The shape of the jaw resembling a huge, erect penis also signifies the phallic character of Ahab's desire: "His bone leg steadied in that hole; one arm elevated, and holding by a shroud; Captain Ahab stood erect, looking straight out beyond the ship's ever-pitching prow."<sup>54</sup> And finally, it is

---

<sup>52</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 124.

<sup>53</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 472.

<sup>54</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 124.

only a small step from the ship's prow to the captain's sexual prowess. The ever-pitching *Pequod* riding through the waves like an over-sized, permanently ejaculating penis also confirms Ahab's castration. Ahab, polarized with the white whale, occupies the place of the castrated master of the ship--but not (yet) the place of the (dead) father himself. Ahab represents both the law of the ship while being subjected to the law of castration: no living human being can fully occupy the place of the dead father.

As a result of Ahab's castration complex, which directly influences both his ego and his unconscious, Ahab vicariously pursues the object of his fantasy, the image of the white whale, in the realm of the Imaginary (I). The white whale functions as a signifier in the imaginary register but, as stated earlier, something about the white whale refuses any representation as an image and hence belongs to the field of the Real (R). Ahab's identification with an image in the realm of the Imaginary (I) of Lacan's Schéma L [see graphic on page 135] becomes symptomatic in the following list of signifiers.

the white whale as image (other)  
 the (black) sperm whales  
 "a mirror before me" (374)  
 "the human eye as a magic glass" (544)  
 "death-longing eyes" 486)  
     the Imaginary (I)

The structure of the human ego is narcissistic by definition, Lacan says, because "the human ego is founded on the basis of the imaginary relation."<sup>55</sup>

The change from identification with the incestuously desired object in the sphere of the Real (R) to narcissistic identification with another image in the sphere of the Imaginary (I) carries a certain aggressive and deadly potential: "Yes, there is death in this business of whaling [Ishmael concedes in chapter 7]--a speechlessly quick chaotic bundling of a man into Eternity."<sup>56</sup> The fountain of the whale is deemed poisonous, the narrator explains: "[I]f the jet is fairly spouted into your eyes, it will blind you."<sup>57</sup> The confusion which the narrator describes recalls Lacan's findings about frustration and aggression during the mirror stage: "While composing a little treatise on Eternity, I had the curiosity to place a mirror before me; and ere long saw reflected there, a curious involved worming and undulation in the atmosphere over my head."<sup>58</sup>

Water, as a spring, a whale spout, or a lagoon in Venice, seems to function as a catalyst for the imaginary or narcissistic identification, linking the Symbolic (S), the

---

<sup>55</sup> S 1: 113.

<sup>56</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 37.

<sup>57</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 373.

<sup>58</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 374.

Real (R) and the Imaginary (I). The whale spout apparently provides the mirror effect necessary for a narcissistic identification. Ahab experiences that same effect when looking into Starbuck's eyes right before the first day of the chase. The excited Ahab perceives the human eye as "the Magic glass."<sup>59</sup> But whether the mirrored object is an eye or some other apparition, a "pale, death-glimmer" accompanies one's identification with that image.<sup>60</sup>

As in Greek myth, Melville's novel entails a murderous and violent potential which manifests itself in the hunt of the white whale--the search for an image instead of the phallic Mother. In *Moby-Dick*, it is this incestuous desire "for things remote," as the example of Ishmael and the rest of the crew confirm, which is intensified in Ahab after the white whale took his leg. But the change from incestuous desire to narcissistic desire has taken place before the first words are told in *Moby-Dick*. Ahab is plagued by monomania long before Moby Dick takes his leg.

From the beginning of the novel, we find the universal incestuous desire in *Moby-Dick* transformed into narcissistic identification with "the image of the ungraspable phantom of life," the image of the white whale which, even if it were obtained, would never be as good as the incestuously desired

---

<sup>59</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 544.

<sup>60</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 548.

object. A sense of violent action lingers hidden in the background of Melville's tale but it is not so much the physical threat of the sea or the whale but the psychic threat of the ungraspable image. The repression of incestuous desire and its displacement with an image through narcissistic identification mark the point in which the myth of Oedipus and the myth of Narcissus are linked.<sup>61</sup>

The symptom ( $\Sigma$ ) of Ahab's narcissistic structure in *Moby-Dick* is the whaling voyage, Ahab's monomaniac quest for the image of the white whale, which holds the fields of the Symbolic (S), the Real (R), and the Imaginary (I) together, and culminates in the fatal chase over three days in chapters 133 to 135. "Then tossing both arms, with measureless imprecations he shouted out: 'Aye, aye! and I'll chase him round Good Hope, and round the Horn, and round the Norway Maelstrom, and round perdition's flames before I give him up. And this is what ye have shipped for, men! to chase that white whale on both sides of land, and over all sides

---

<sup>61</sup> Hamilton, 1 claims "to invite the reader to look at [the two myths], and thereby the theory of psychoanalysis, in a different light." Even though Hamilton's study about child development discusses the myths of Narcissus and Oedipus, it does not provide a psychoanalytic reading of them. Her book remains at the behavioral level and assumes a linear development from the narcissistic to the oedipal stage. The relationship between the two stages, however, is of a different kind. Because of the incest prohibition, some people, consciously or unconsciously, attempt to overcome the cultural restriction (Oedipus), others comply with the existing rules (Narcissus). In a paper presented at the 128th annual meeting of the American Philological Association and entitled "Ovid's Narcissus: An Echo of the Oedipus 'Complex,'" Ingo Gildenhard argued that Ovid's Narcissus story was modeled after Sophocles' *Oedipus*.

of earth, till he spouts black blood and rolls fin out.'"<sup>62</sup> And a little later Ahab exclaims: "How can the prisoner reach outside except by thrusting through the wall? To me, the white whale is that wall, shoved near to me. . . . Talk not to me of blasphemy, man; I'd strike the sun if it insulted me."<sup>63</sup> At the beginning of chapter 46 of Melville's novel, the narrator underscores Ahab's obsession as a crazy hunter of the white whale: "Ahab in all his thoughts and actions ever had in view the ultimate capture of Moby Dick; though he seemed ready to sacrifice all mortal interests to that one passion."<sup>64</sup>

There are more than a dozen other instances in *Moby-Dick* in which Ahab's obsession manifests itself.<sup>65</sup> Killing

---

<sup>62</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 163.

<sup>63</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 164.

<sup>64</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 211.

<sup>65</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 230: "[Ahab] had already revealed his intention to hunt the mortal monster in person;" *Moby-Dick*, 317: Ahab remains determined to hunt the white whale after the fatal encounter of another captain's sailor with Moby Dick; *Moby-Dick*, 383: "[Ahab] beheld, how through that same gate he was now both chasing and being chased to his deadly end;" *Moby-Dick*, 429: "There she blows!--the ghost is spouted up, and away we sail to fight some other world, and go through young life's old routine;" *Moby-Dick*, 441: After meeting Captain Boomer who lost an arm to Moby Dick, Ahab has the following conversation with him: Boomer: "'[H]e's best let alone, don't you think so, Captain [Ahab]?'-glancing at the ivory leg. 'He is. But he will still be hunted, for all that. What is best let alone, that accursed thing is not always what least allures. He's all a magnet! How long since you saw'st him last? Which way heading?'" *Moby-Dick*, 531-532: Ahab icily received and declined the petition of a fellow captain to help him search for some of his lost crew--because he does not want to lose time in his hunt of Moby Dick; *Moby-Dick*, 536: "[N]ow that all his successive meetings with various ships contrastingly concurred to show the



white whales to exploit the valuable sperm oil would not satisfy Ahab: "Moby Dick was yet to be slain; and though a thousand other whales were brought to his ship, all that would not one jot advance his grand, monomaniac object."<sup>66</sup> Ahab correctly assesses that he has made himself the prisoner of the white whale but he falsely assumes that he can escape imprisonment by destroying the whale. Ahab is obsessed enough to risk not only his but the lives of his crew as well in the narcissistic quest for Moby Dick when he declares: "Death to Moby Dick! God hunt us all, if we do not Moby Dick to his death!"<sup>67</sup>

Assessing Ahab's (and the human) predicament, the narrator suggests one way of breaking the cycle of endlessly pursuing a desired object: "For now, since by many prolonged, repeated experiences, I have perceived that in all cases man must eventually lower, or at least shift, his conceit of attainable felicity; not placing it anywhere in

---

demoniac indifference with which the white whale tore his hunters, whether sinning or sinned against; now it was that there lurked a something in the old man's eyes, which it was hardly sufferable for feeble souls to see;" *Moby-Dick*, 537: "[Ahab's] whole life was now become one watch on deck;" *Moby-Dick*, 547: Ahab is the first to see Moby Dick, thus winning his own doubloon he had awarded for that instance; *Moby-Dick*, 561: After Ahab lost one of his crew members on the second day of the chase: "I'll ten times girdle the unmeasured globe; yea and dive straight through it, but I'll slay him yet!" *Moby-Dick*, 566: Not even sharks surrounding Ahab's boat can stop the old man; *Moby-Dick*, 568: "'Oh! Ahab," cried Starbuck, "not too late is it, even now, the third day, to desist. See! Moby Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou, that madly seekest him!"

<sup>66</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 292.

<sup>67</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 166.

the intellect or the fancy [the Imaginary (I)]; but in the wife, the heart, the bed, the table, the saddle, the fire-side, the country [the Symbolic (S)]."<sup>68</sup> The obsessed captain consumed by his fatal pride nonetheless sacrifices his whole crew in pursuit of the white whale.

Narcissus, in contrast, had abstained from his incestuous desire; he died because of the frustration he felt when narcissistically identifying with his mirror image. It is axiomatic to the narcissistic identification that the desired object is not the real thing. The narcissistically desired object, i.e., the white whale, for instance, is only an image of the real thing, the forbidden, supreme good. Because--to use the Lacanian term--the supreme good, the Mother, i.e., the parent of the opposite sex, is not attainable as an object of one's desire in any culture, it belongs in the realm of the "forbidden seas." Because of the universal incest prohibition, the (phallic) Mother is "remote" and incestuous desire has to be suppressed. If indeed, as it happens in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, the Father is killed and the incestuous desire for the Mother is satisfied, one can still not live happily as *Oedipus*' self-inflicted punishment shows when he finds out

---

<sup>68</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 416.

what terrible crimes he has committed.<sup>69</sup> By killing his Father and sleeping with his Mother, Oedipus surpassed himself and human culture.

In chapter 32 of *Moby-Dick* on the cetology, or the sciences of the whales, it is put before the reader that "we are all killers, on land and on sea."<sup>70</sup> Some of us, such as Oedipus, who represents the homicidal type, seem to be more violent than others, such as Narcissus, who represents the suicidal type. The whale hunt turns out to be a suicidal enterprise: "'There she blows!' and away they fly to fight another whale, and go through the whole weary thing again. Oh! my friends, but this is man-killing! Yet this is life."<sup>71</sup> The law of Ahab's case--i.e., his obsession with hunting Moby Dick--and of the narcissistic structure in general calls for death:

'Will you tell me whether it is an unalterable law in this fishery, Mr. Flask, for an oarsman to break his own back pulling himself back-foremost into death's jaws?'

'Can't you twist that smaller?' said Flask. 'Yes, that's the law. I should like to see a boat's crew

---

<sup>69</sup> "Father" and "Mother" are capitalized because as symbols they represent the parent of the opposite sex. In other words, for any son the "Father" is his father and the "Mother" is his mother, whereas for any daughter the "Father" is her mother and the "Mother" is her father.

<sup>70</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 143.

<sup>71</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 429.

backing water up to a whale face foremost. Ha, ha! the whale would give them squint for squint, mind that!'

Here then, from three impartial witnesses, I had a deliberate statement of the entire case.<sup>72</sup>

In chapter 112 about the blacksmith, the narrator gives a similar perspective on death as an integral part of the narcissistic structure:

Death seems to be the only desirable sequel for a career like this; but Death is only launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored; therefore, to the death-longing eyes of such men, who still have left in them some interior compunctions against suicide, does the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean alluringly spread forth his whole plain of unimaginable, taking terrors, and wonderful, new-life adventures; and from the hearts of infinite Pacifics, the thousand mermaids sing to them--"Come hither, broken hearted; here is another life without the guilt of intermediate death; here are wonders supernatural, without dying for them. Come hither! bury thyself in a life which, to your now equally abhorred and abhorring, landed world, is more oblivious than death. Come hither! put up thy grave-stone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till we marry thee!"<sup>73</sup>

"Death is only launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored," the realm of the unconscious or Real (R). Following one's

---

<sup>72</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 486.

desire and seeking the wild, one immediately risks one's life. The eyes of such people are characterized as "death-longing," just as in the case of Narcissus, and "suicide" seems to be the norm rather than the exception. The mention of the mermaids reminds one of the deadly quality of the Sirens against which sailors had to protect themselves.<sup>74</sup>

In the final chapter (135), *Moby Dick* destroys not only the *Pequod* but also drags down Captain Ahab as he continues to chase the whale: "The harpoon was darted; the stricken whale flew forward; with igniting velocity the line ran through the groove;--ran foul. Ahab stooped to clear it; he did clear it; but the flying turn caught him round the neck, and voicelessly as Turkish mutes bowstring their victim, he was shot out of the boat, ere the crew knew he was gone. Next instant, the heavy eye-splice in the rope's final end flew out of the stark-empty tub, knocked down an oarsman, and smiting the sea, disappeared in its depths."<sup>75</sup> Just as Narcissus' obsession with his mirror image ended in his passing away, Ahab's obsession with *Moby Dick* turns out to be suicidal in nature.

---

<sup>74</sup> About the lethal characteristic of the Sirens see Dolores M. O'Higgins, "Medea as Muse: Pindar's *Pythian* 4," chap. 5 in *Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*, ed. James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 103-126, here 110.

<sup>75</sup> *Moby-Dick*, 572.

V. GUSTAV VON ASCHENBACH'S NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE IN  
THOMAS MANN'S *DER TOD IN VENEDIG*

Freude, Überraschung, Bewunderung mochten sich offen darin malen, als sein Blick dem des Vermißten begegnete,--und in dieser Sekunde geschah es, daß Tadzio lächelte: ihn anlächelte, sprechend, vertraut, liebebreizend und unverholen, mit Lippen, die sich im Lächeln erst langsam öffneten. Es war das Lächeln des Narziß, der sich über das spiegelnde Wasser neigt, jenes tiefe, bezauberte, hingezogene Lächeln, verzerrt von der Aussichtslosigkeit seines Trachtens, die holden Lippen seines Schattens zu küssen, kokett, neugierig und leise gequält, betört und betörend.

Joy no doubt, surprise, admiration, were openly displayed on his face when his eyes met those of the returning absentee--and in that instant it happened that Tadzio smiled: smiled at him, speakingly, familiarly, enchantingly and quite unabashed, with his lips parting slowly as the smile was formed. It was the smile of Narcissus as he bows his head over the mirroring water, that profound, fascinated, protracted smile with which he reaches out his arms towards the reflection of his own beauty--a very slightly contorted smile, contorted by the hopelessness of his attempt to kiss the sweet lips of his shadow; a smile that was provocative, curious and imperceptibly troubled, bewitched and bewitching.<sup>1</sup>

This description of Gustav von Aschenbach's feelings at the sight of Tadzio in Thomas Mann's novella *Der Tod in Venedig* [*Death in Venice*] (1912), captures two essential exigencies of the hero's narcissistic structure: first, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Mann, *Gesammelte Werke*, 12 vols. ([Frankfurt/Main]: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960) (hereafter abbreviated as Mann, GW), 8: 498/Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, trans. David Luke (London: Secker and Warburg, 1990) (hereafter abbreviated as *Death in Venice*), 244.

"Aussichtslosigkeit seines Trachtens [the hopelessness of his attempt]," which reflects both his desire--located in the realm of the Real (R)--and the obsession ( $\Sigma$ ) with his desire, and second, the imaginary identification with the other "*als sein Blick dem des Vermißten begegnete* [when his eyes met those of the returning absentee]," located in the realm of the Imaginary (I). Because Aschenbach's (incestuous) desire is hopeless, it is substituted and finds its expression in the pursuit of the image of young Tadzio.<sup>2</sup>

Aschenbach, the reputable German author, who had made a name for himself as a young man, arrives in Venice as a result of his ardent thirst for distant scenes: "*Fluchtdrang war [der Grund], daß er es sich eingestand, diese Sehnsucht ins Ferne und Neue, diese Begierde nach Befreiung, Entbürdung und Vergessen,--der Drang hinweg vom Werke, von der Alltagsstätte eines starren, kalten und leidenschaftlichen Dienstes* [Nevertheless, he knew the reason for the unexpected temptation only too well. This relaxation and forgetfulness--it had been, he was bound to admit, an urge to escape, to run away from his writing, away

---

<sup>2</sup> About the incest motif in other works of Thomas Mann see Mechthild Curtius, *Erotische Phantasien bei Thomas Mann: Wälsungenblut, Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull, Der Erwählte, Die vertauschten Köpfe, Joseph in Ägypten* (Königstein, Taunus: Athenäum, 1984), especially chapter one "Inzest als eine der 'unausgeträumten Zuneigungen der Welt,'" 9-60; Peter Dettmerring, *Dichtung und Psychoanalyse: Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Richard Wagner* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1969), 64-73.

from the humdrum scene of his cold inflexible, passionate duty]."<sup>3</sup> In Venice, Aschenbach's *Sehnsucht* and *Begierde* find an object in Tadzio; the elderly writer becomes obsessed with the young boy's beauty. Aschenbach's pursuit of his object of desire finally climaxes in the fatal collapse of the hero.

Aschenbach's narcissistic structure becomes symptomatic in many passages in *Der Tod in Venedig*: "Almost all students recognize, from the opening paragraph of *Death in Venice*, the manifest psychological issues this work presents."<sup>4</sup> His castration, his desire, his imaginary identification with another object, and his symptom ( $\Sigma$ )--the relentless pursuit of Tadzio's image--form *Leitmotive* which run through the whole novella. Aschenbach's castration, located in Lacan's realm of the Symbolic (S), is mentioned from chapter two on, Aschenbach's desire, located in Lacan's realm of the Real (R), is immediately made a topic in Mann's opening paragraph, and Aschenbach's imaginary identification with Tadzio, located in Lacan's realm of the Imaginary (I), finds its object with the appearance of the beautiful young boy in chapter three.

---

<sup>3</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 448/*Death in Venice*, 200-201.

<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey B. Berlin, "Psychoanalysis, Freud, and Thomas Mann" in *Approaches to Teaching Mann's Death in Venice and Other Short Fiction*, ed. Jeffrey B. Berlin (New York: Modern Language Association, 1992), 105.



In Thomas Mann's novella, the overwhelming nature of his desire pesters Aschenbach from the beginning. The 50-year-old German writer Gustav von Aschenbach is introduced as "überreizt [overstimulated]," he had "dem Fortschwingen des produzierenden Triebwerkes in seinem Inneren, jenem 'motus animi continuus', worin nach Cicero das Wesen der Beredsamkeit besteht, auch nach der Mittagsmahlzeit nicht Einhalt zu tun vermocht und den entlastenden Schlummer nicht gefunden, der ihm, bei zunehmender Abnutzbarkeit seiner Kräfte, einmal untertags so nötig war [the productive mechanism in his mind--that *motus animi continuus* which according to Cicero is the essence of eloquence--had so pursued its reverberating rhythm that he had been unable to halt it after lunch, and had missed the refreshing daily siesta which was now necessary for him as he became increasingly subject to fatigue]."<sup>5</sup> When Aschenbach takes a walk to regain his composure, he is again overcome by roving restlessness and an ardent desire:

[E]ine seltsame Ausweitung seines Innern ward ihm ganz überraschend bewußt, eine Art schweifender Unruhe, ein jugendlich durstiges Verlangen in die Ferne, ein Gefühl, so lebhaft, so neu oder doch so längst entwöhnt und verlernt, daß er, die Hände auf dem Rücken und den Blick am Boden, gefesselt stehenblieb, um die Empfindung auf Wesen und Ziel zu prüfen.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 444/*Death in Venice*, 197.

Es war Reiselust, nichts weiter; aber wahrhaft als Anfall auftretend und ins Leidenschaftliche, ja bis zur Sinnestäuschung gesteigert. Seine Begierde ward sehend, seine Einbildungskraft, noch nicht zur Ruhe gekommen seit den Stunden der Arbeit, schuf sich ein Beispiel für alle Wunder und Schrecken der mannigfaltigen Erde, die sie auf einmal sich vorzustellen bestrebt war.

[H]e now became conscious, to his complete surprise, of an extraordinary expansion of his inner self, a kind of roving restlessness, a youthful craving for far-off places, a feeling so new or at least so long unaccustomed and forgotten that he stood as if rooted, with his hands clasped behind his back and his eyes to the ground, trying to ascertain the nature and purport of his emotion.

It was simply a desire to travel; but it had presented itself as nothing less than seizure, with intensely passionate and indeed hallucinatory force, turning his craving into vision. His imagination, still not at rest from the morning's hours of work, shaped for itself a paradigm of all the wonders and terrors of the manifold earth, of all that it was now suddenly striving to envisage.<sup>6</sup>

In this rich passage, all essential elements of Aschenbach's narcissistic structure are symptomatic. His desire, located in the field of the Real (R), occurs ill-concealed as his desire to travel, a nice metaphor, which still carries the core meaning of the original emotion: "Lust" or "Verlangen [desire]" disguised as "Reiselust [desire to travel]." Aschenbach's castration, located in the field of the Symbolic (S), also appears in a hidden way: it is simply said that his desire was "entwöhnt," i.e.,

---

<sup>6</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 446-447/*Death in Venice*, 199.

Aschenbach has been disaccustomed to his latent desire through cultural training. Because his metaphorical longing for completeness cannot be fulfilled, Aschenbach's desire is transformed into imaginary identification, located in the field of the Imaginary (I): "*Seine Begierde ward sehend, seine Einbildungskraft, noch nicht zur Ruhe gekommen.*" The above cited passage illustrates the displacement of Aschenbach's incestuous desire, the substitution of his desire with an imaginary (or narcissistic) identification.

The picture that comes to Aschenbach's mind confirms the sexual character of his desire, located in the field of Lacan's Real (R):

[E]r sah, sah eine Landschaft, ein tropisches Sumpfgebiet unter dickdunstigem Himmel, feucht, üppig und ungeheuer, eine Art Urweltwildnis aus Inseln, Morästen und Schlamm führenden Wasserarmen,--sah aus geilem Farrengewucher, aus Gründen von fettem, gequollenem und abenteuerlich blühendem Pflanzenwerk haarige Palmengeschäfte nah und ferne emporstreben, sah wunderlich ungestaltete Bäume ihre Wurzeln durch die Luft in den Boden, in stockende, grünschattig spiegelnde Fluten versenken, wo zwischen schwimmenden Blumen, die milchweiß und groß wie Schüsseln waren, Vögel von fremder Art, hochschultrig, mit unförmigen Schnäbeln, im Seichten standen und unbeweglich zur Seite blickten, sah zwischen den knotigen Rohrstämmen des Bambusdickichts die Lichter eines kauernenden Tigers funkeln--und fühlte sein Herz pochen vor Entsetzen und rätselhaftem Verlangen.

[H]e saw it, saw a landscape, a tropical swampland under a cloud-swollen sky, moist and lush and monstrous, a kind of primeval wilderness of islands, morasses and muddy alluvial channels; far and wide around him he saw hairy palm-trunks thrusting upwards from rank jungles of fern, from among thick fleshy plants in exuberant flower; saw strangely misshapen

trees with roots that arched through the air before sinking into the ground or into stagnant, shadowy-green, glassy waters where milk-white blossoms floated as big as plates, and among them exotic birds with grotesque beaks stood hunched in the shallows, their heads tilted motionlessly sideways; saw between the knotted stems of the bamboo thicket the glinting eyes of a crouching tiger; and his heart throbbed with terror and mysterious longing.<sup>7</sup>

Aschenbach's "mysterious longing" euphemistically expresses his incestuous desire. The German text--even more so than the English translation--carries sexual metaphors in manifold ways. "[E]in tropisches Sumpfgebiet . . . feucht, üppig und ungeheuer, eine Art Urweltwildnis" disguises the female genital area. Because Aschenbach's arousal (*aus geilem Farrengewucher*)--phallic in nature ("hairy palm-trunks thrusting upwards")--aims at the primeval wilderness of the phallic Mother, his imagination terrifies the distinguished and refined German author. The following list of signifiers records those points in which Aschenbach's incestuous desire becomes symptomatic in the realm of the Real (R).

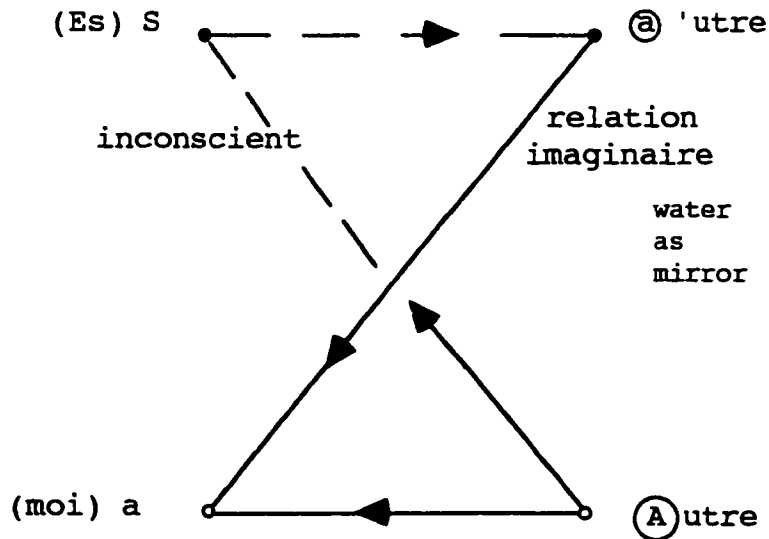
Aschenbachs rätselhaftes Verlangen (Mann, GW 8: 447)  
 Aschenbachs Sehnsucht, Begierde (448)  
 Urweltwildnis aus geilem Farrengewucher (447)  
 emporstrebende Palmengeschäfte (447)  
 Merkmale feurig spielender Laune (449)  
 Müßiggang, die sorglose Fahrlässigkeit der Jugend (451)

---

<sup>7</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 447/*Death in Venice*, 199-200.

rascheres, sinnlicheres Blut (450)  
 das Verworfene, der Abgrund (455)  
 das Böse, Verbotene, sittlich Unmögliche (455)  
 ein Leben voll ausschweifender Leidenschaften (457)  
 das Fremdartige und Bezugslose (457)  
 das Absurde und Unerlaubte (468)  
 eine Insel mit schön zerrissenen Klippenpartien (458)  
 Geruch von Meer und Sumpf (483)  
 elysisches Land, wo leichtestes Leben den Menschen beschert ist (488)  
 Rausch (490. 494. 511), aufschwärmendes Entzücken, Wallen, Feuer (490)  
 uralte und bis dahin niemals von eigenem Feuer belebte Gedanken (490)  
 Amor (491), Manie (499), Eros (492), Passion (502), Erregung (492)  
 das Meer, das ihn wallend vorwärts zu schwemmen schien,  
     goldene Speere zuckten von unten zur Höhe des Himmels hinauf,  
     der Glanz ward zum Brande, lautlos mit göttlicher Übergewalt  
     wälzten sich Glut und Brunst und lodernde Flammen herauf (495)  
 Unruhe und überreizte Neugier, die Hysterie eines unbefriedigten,  
     unnatürlich unterdrückten Erkenntnis- und Austauschbedürfnisses  
     und namentlich auch eine Art von gespannter Achtung (496)  
 er stellte ihm nach, er eilte, folgte verstohlen, suchte erhitzt (501)  
 zarte Sinneslust (489), Lust (502. 516), betäubende Wollust (517)  
 er spähte ungezügelter aus (503)  
 der tiefe, lockende Flötenton (517)  
 Unzucht und Raserei des Untergangs (517)  
 Geheimnis (505), das Ungeheuerliche (518)  
 auf den Spuren des Schönen (520)  
 am Narrenseile geleitet von der Passion (520)  
 Sündenweg, der mit Notwendigkeit in die Irre leitete (521)  
 eine unverbesserliche und natürliche Richtung zum Abgrund (522)  
 ins Verheißungsvoll-Ungeheure (525)  
 the (phallic) mother  
 the Real (R)

the Imaginary (I)



Aschenbach (as ego)

the Symbolic (S)

After Aschenbach has regained his composure, he again rationalizes his desire in a statement that underlines the sexual nature of his desire (to travel): "*Er hatte, zum mindesten seit ihm die Mittel zu Gebote gewesen waren, die Vorteile des Weltverkehrs beliebig zu genießen, das Reisen nicht anders denn als hygienische Maßregel betrachtet, die gegen Sinn und Neigung dann und wann hatte getroffen werden müssen* [His attitude to foreign travel, at least since he had had the means at his disposal to enjoy its advantages as often as he pleased, had always been that it was nothing more than a necessary health precaution, to be taken from time to time however disinclined to it one might be]." <sup>8</sup> The English translation does not capture the ambivalence of *die Vorteile des Weltverkehrs* because the German word *Verkehr* also translates as "intercourse," giving it its appropriate meaning in this context. In this sense, Aschenbach legitimizes to indulge in his desire (for Tadzio) from the beginning, even if his inclination and morals (*gegen Sinn*) tell him otherwise.

The fact that Aschenbach's desire is subject to repression is also spelled out in the first chapter of *Der Tod in Venedig*: "*Auch wurde denn, was ihn da eben so spät und plötzlich angewandelt, sehr bald durch Vernunft und von*

---

<sup>8</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 447/*Death in Venice*, 200.

*jung auf geübte Selbstzucht gemäßigt und richtiggestellt* [And sure enough, the sudden and belated impulse that had just overwhelmed him very soon came under the moderating and corrective influence of common sense and of self-discipline he had practised since his youth]."<sup>9</sup> Aschenbach's "*Sehnsucht ins Ferne und Neue, diese Begierde nach Befreiung, Entbürdung und Vergessen,--der Drang hinweg vom Werke, von der Alltagsstätte eines starren, kalten und leidenschaftlichen Dienstes* [This relaxation and forgetfulness--it had been, he was bound to admit, an urge to escape, to run away from his writing, away from the humdrum scene of his cold, inflexible passionate duty]" may be repressed but is latent, only to find an outlet in his "passionate" writing.<sup>10</sup> But too much repression apparently does not act favorably on Aschenbach's work, as the frustrated author realizes.

While considering whether he should break the inhibition or not, Aschenbach wonders: "*Rächte sich nun also die geknechtete Empfindung, indem sie ihn verließ, indem sie seine Kunst fürder zu tragen und zu beflügeln sich weigerte und alle Lust, alles Entzücken an der Form und am Ausdruck mit sich wegnahm?* [Could it be that the enslaved emotion was

---

<sup>9</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 448/*Death in Venice*, 200.

<sup>10</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 448/*Death in Venice*, 200-201.

now avenging itself by deserting him, by refusing from now on to bear up his art on its wings, by taking with it all his joy in words, all his appetite for the beauty of form?]"<sup>11</sup> Being a master of his trade, Aschenbach cannot take any pleasure in a mastery which suppresses any "*Merkmale feurig spielender Laune* [element of sparkling and joyful improvisation]."

As we learn at the beginning of chapter two, Aschenbach's "emotion," his desire, was enslaved in many ways. His ancestors had been men who had spent their "disciplined, decently austere life in the service of the King and the state. Aschenbach's "Prussian" way of life has been shaped by "*dienstlich nüchterner Gewissenhaftigkeit* [hard-working, sober conscientiousness]," located in the real of Lacan's Symbolic (S).<sup>12</sup>

The following list of signifiers captures those points in which the Name-of-the-Father or law of incest prohibition becomes symptomatic in the realm of the Symbolic (S) of Lacan's Schéma L [see graphic on page 172]:

castration: das Sittengestz (GW 8: 518)  
die gesicherte Ordnung und  
Wohlfahrt des Alltags (500)

---

<sup>11</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 449/*Death in Venice*, 201.

<sup>12</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 450/*Death in Venice*, 202. On Aschenbach's Prussian way of life see Hans W. Nicklas, *Thomas Manns Novelle Der Tod in Venedig: Analyse des Motivzusammenhangs and der Erzählstruktur* (Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1968), 21-22.



Moralität (452), Sinn (447)  
 Vernunft und von jung auf geübte  
 Selbstzucht (448)  
 die geknechtete Empfindung (449)  
 dienstlich nüchternde  
 Gewissenhaftigkeit (450)  
 der Inbegriff leidend-tätiger  
 Tugend (451)  
 Zucht (452), ständige Anspannung  
 (451)  
 in stolzer Scham, elegante  
 Selbstbeherrschung (453)  
 das Mustergültig-Festehende,  
 Geschliffen-Herkömmliche,  
 Erhaltene, Formelle (456)  
 tiefen und geistigen Widerstand  
 (516)  
 Kultur seines Lebens (516)  
 Weisheit und Manneswürde (521)  
 language: Marmormasse der Sprache (490)  
 intellektuelle Dinge (491)  
 Lust des Wortes (492)  
 Eros im Worte (492)  
 daß das Wort die sinnliche  
 Schönheit nicht  
 wiederzugeben vermag (498)  
 Wucht des Wortes, mit welcher hier  
 das Verworfenen verworfen  
 wurde (497)  
 Geist, Erkenntnis (454. 497. 498)  
 the Symbolic (S)

Obligated to achieve exceptional things since his  
 boyhood, Aschenbach had never known "*den Müßiggang, niemals  
 die sorglose Fahrlässigkeit der Jugend* [youth's idleness,  
 its carefree negligent ways], . . . *sein Lieblingswort war  
 'Durchhalten',--er sah in seinem Friedrich-Roman nichts  
 anderes als die Apotheose dieses Befehlswortes, das ihm der  
 Inbegriff leidend-tätiger Tugend erschien* [But he would  
 'stay the course'--it was his favorite motto, he saw his  
 historical novel about Frederic the Great as nothing if not  
 the apotheosis of this, the king's word of command,

'durchhalten!', which to Aschenbach epitomized a manly ethos of suffering action]." <sup>13</sup>

Even though Aschenbach's life is informed by repression from early age on ("*Zucht war ja zum Glücke sein eingeborenes Erbteil von väterlicher Seite* [discipline, after all, was fortunately his inborn heritage on his father's side]" <sup>14</sup>), incestuous desire was tempting the patient artist occasionally: "[*R*]ascheres, sinnlicheres Blut war der Familie in der vorigen Generation durch die Mutter des Dichters, Tochter eines böhmischen Kapellmeisters, zugekommen [a strain of livelier, more sensuous blood had entered the family in the previous generation with the writer's mother, the daughter of a director of music from Bohemia]." <sup>15</sup> It is noteworthy that the incestuous aspect of Aschenbach's desire, attributed to the mother's side of the family, is spelled out here; also, the phrase "in the previous generation" denotes the remoteness of the incestuous desire, located in Lacan's realm of the Real (R).

In order to "stay the course" and stay away from the temptations of incestuous desire, Aschenbach's life is said to be enslaved by cultural repression: "[*Seine Natur war*]

---

<sup>13</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 451/*Death in Venice*, 203-204.

<sup>14</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 452/*Death in Venice*, 204.

<sup>15</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 450/*Death in Venice*, 202.

*zur ständigen Anspannung nur berufen, nicht eigentlich geboren* [the constant harnessing of his energies was something to which he had been called, but not really born].<sup>16</sup> The image of the tightly closed fist, which does not open in a relaxed manner but is either tense or hanging down limply, is used as a recurring metaphor three times to capture Aschenbach's existence.<sup>17</sup>

Aschenbach never lets go, he is constantly self-controlled. While others waste their time, money, and energy (on a fulfilling sex life) and procrastinate the execution of great plans, the 40-year-old, even 50-year-old author would begin his day by dashing cold water over his body--to kill his morning erection, one may assume, and to sacrifice two or three ardently conscientious morning hours to art. "*Es war verzeihlich, ja, es bedeutete recht eigentlich den Sieg seiner Moralität* [It was a pardonable error, indeed it was one that betokened as nothing else could the triumph of his moral will]," located in the real of Lacan's Symbolic (S).<sup>18</sup> In those conscientious morning hours, the author Aschenbach created a literary figure of the new hero-type congruent to his own personal destiny, a

---

<sup>16</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 451/*Death in Venice*, 203.

<sup>17</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 451. 486. 498/*Death in Venice*, 203. 234. 244.

<sup>18</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 452/*Death in Venice*, 204.

literary conception "'einer intellektuellen und jünglinghaften Männlichkeit . . . die in stolzer Scham die Zähne aufeinanderbeißt und ruhig dasteht, während ihr die Schwerter und Speere durch den Leib gehen' [of 'an intellectual and boyish manly virtue, that of a youth who clenches his teeth in proud shame and stands calmly on as the swords and spears pass through his body']".<sup>19</sup> Aschenbach's narcissistic structure conceals both "*elegante Selbstbeherrschung* [elegant self-control]" from the world's eyes and the "*gefährliche Leben, die rasch entnervende Sehnsucht* [dangerous life of the born deceiver, his ambition and his art which lead so soon to exhaustion]".<sup>20</sup> In Lacan's words, Aschenbach was torn between the poles of the repressed Real (R) and the repressing Symbolic (S).

"*Lebendige, geistig [(S)] unverbindliche Greifbarkeit der Gestaltung bildet das Ergötzen der bürgerlichen Massen, aber leidenschaftlich [(R)] unbedingte Jugend wird durch das Problematische gefesselt: und Aschenbach war problematisch, war unbedingt gewesen wie nur irgendein Jüngling. Er hatte dem Geiste gefrönt, mit der Erkenntnis Raubbau betrieben, Saatfrucht vermahlen* [Lively, clear-outlined, intellectually undemanding presentation is the delight of the great mass of

---

<sup>19</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 453/*Death in Venice*, 205.

<sup>20</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 453/*Death in Venice*, 205.

the middle-class public, but passionate radical youth is interested only in problems: and Aschenbach had been as problematic and as radical as any young man ever was. He had been in thrall to intellect, had exhausted the soil by excessive analysis and ground up the seed-corn of growth]."<sup>21</sup> In other words, Aschenbach used to be a care-free sexual being (*er war unbedingt gewesen*) and apparently had an active sex life (*er hatte Saatfrucht vermahlen*). However, as a mature master of his feelings, Aschenbach ascended to dignity because he had acquired the knowledge to repress and control his desire--he thinks.

*"Die Wucht des Wortes, mit welcher hier das Verworfenne verworfen wurde, verkündete die Abkehr von allem moralischen Zweifelsinn, von jeder Sympathie mit dem Abgrund [The forthright words of condemnation which here weighed vileness in the balance and found it wanting--they proclaimed their writer's renunciation of all moral scepticism, of every kind of sympathy with the abyss]."*<sup>22</sup> It is useful to remind ourselves that Lacan identified the realm of the Symbolic (S) with language.<sup>23</sup> Since the Symbolic (S) is also the field associated with the castration complex, we can infer

---

<sup>21</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 454/*Death in Venice*, 206.

<sup>22</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 455/*Death in Venice*, 207.

<sup>23</sup> *S* 1: 74.

by deduction that language has a castrating quality on the human subject. Because our culture is based on language, there will always be some (repressed) desire in the realm of the Real (R).

Language seems to be expressive and it seems contra-intuitive to construe it as repressive but the very act of signification places "the real thing" out of the reach of the human subject. The fact that desire is repressed to some extent and never dissolved fully finds its expression in the following rhetorical question in *Der Tod in Venedig*: "*Aber moralische Entschlossenheit jenseits des Wissens, der auflösenden und hemmenden Erkenntnis,--bedeutet sie nicht wiederum eine Vereinfachung, eine sittliche Vereinfältigung der Welt und der Seele und also auch ein Erstarken zum Bösen, Verbotenen, zum sittlich Unmöglichen?* [And yet: moral resoluteness at the far side of knowledge, achieved in despite of all corrosive and inhibiting insight--does not this in its turn signify a simplification, a moral simplistic view of the world and of human psychology, and thus also a resurgence of energies that are evil, forbidden, morally impossible?]." <sup>24</sup> The problem is two-faced, as we learn, because the "corrosive" element (R) will always try to bend morality (S).

---

<sup>24</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 455/*Death in Venice*, 207.

Following a certain path within the narcissistic structure, Gustav von Aschenbach "wandelte sich ins Mustergültig-Feststehende, Geschliffen-Herkömmliche, Erhaltende, Formelle [(S)] . . . [und verbannte] aus seiner Sprachweise [(S)] jedes gemeine [(R)] Wort [took on something of an official air, of an educator's stance; his style in later years came to eschew direct audacities, new and subtle nuances, it developed towards the exemplary and definitive, the fastidiously conventional, the conservative and formal and even formulaic . . . so Aschenbach as he grew older banned from his utterance every unrefined word]." <sup>25</sup> Art, however, which Aschenbach pursues for an enhanced (erhöhtes) life, contains "die Spuren imaginärer und geistiger Abenteuer, und . . . erzeugt, selbst bei klösterlicher Stille des äußeren Daseins, auf die Dauer eine Verwöhntheit, Überfeinerung, Müdigkeit und Neugier der Nerven, wie ein Leben voll ausschweifender Leidenschaften und Genüsse sie kaum hervorzubringen vermag [the traces of imaginary [(I)] and intellectual adventures, and . . . leads in the long term to overfastidiousness, over-refinement, nervous fatigue and overstimulation, such as seldom result

---

<sup>25</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 456/*Death in Venice*, 208.

from a life full of the most extravagant passions [(R)] and pleasures]."26

Torn between the poles of the Real (R) and the Symbolic (S), between unconscious desire for the phallic Mother and a repressive culture, Aschenbach is in search of the real thing at the beginning of chapter three in *Der Tod in Venedig*: "Was er suchte, war das Fremdartige und Bezuglose [What he sought was something strange and random]."27 Again, the "Fremdartige" is located in the inaccessible sphere of the Real (R), it is "bezugslos,"--not random but rather without connection--because the incest prohibition does not allow any incestuous relationship. The following relative clause "*das Fremdartige und Bezuglose, welches jedoch rasch zu erreichen wäre* [strange and random, but in a place easily reached]" seems to contradict my contention. However, one has to remember that a text is symptomatic only at certain points, and even a negation can confirm an underlying structure when the immediate context supports an assumption.

In Aschenbach's case, it becomes obvious that he is soon to suffer from narcissistic identification in the field of the Imaginary (I), and that he only attempts to control and to pacify his unconscious desire which continues to

---

26 Mann, *GW*, 8: 457/*Death in Venice*, 209.

27 Mann, *GW*, 8: 457/*Death in Venice*, 209.



bother him. After he has reached an island with "schön zerrissenen Klippenpartien [picturesque fragmented cliffs]"--another metaphor for the shape of the female sex--Aschenbach is still plagued by his desire to look for what he has not and will never find: "[U]nd der Mangel jenes ruhevoll innigen Verhältnisses zum Meere, das nur ein sanfter, sandiger Strand gewährt, verdrossen ihn, ließen ihn nicht das Bewußtsein gewinnen, den Ort seiner Bestimmung getroffen zu haben; ein Zug seines Innern, ihm war noch nicht deutlich, wohin, beunruhigte ihn, er studierte Schiffsverbindungen, er blickte suchend umher [the lack of that restful intimate contact with the sea which can only be had on a gentle, sandy coast, filled him with vexation and with a feeling that he had not yet come to his journey's end. He was haunted by an inner impulse that still had no clear direction; he studied shipping timetables, looked up one place after another]."<sup>28</sup> Because of the universal incest prohibition, there is a strong possibility that people's journeys may end in an early death, the very death Aschenbach will indeed find in Venice, his next stop and final destination. Narcissus, dying as a teenager, serves as a striking example, but even Captain Ahab and Aschenbach die unusually early.

---

<sup>28</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 458/*Death in Venice*, 209.

In chapter three of *Death in Venice*, the first signs of death as part of his narcissistic identification appear when Aschenbach takes a gondola to his hotel. The Venetian gondola is described as "*so eigentümlich schwarz, wie sonst unter allen Dingen nur Särge es sind,--es erinnert an lautlose und verbrecherische Abenteuer in plätschernder Nacht, es erinnert noch mehr an den Tod selbst* [so characteristically black, the way no other thing is black except a coffin--a vehicle evoking lawless adventures in the plashing stillness of night, and still more strongly evoking death itself]." <sup>29</sup> With the "lawless adventures in the plashing stillness of night" forming another metaphor for incestuous sex, the link between these nightly adventures and death reveals the deadliness of incestuous desire within the narcissistic structure. Aschenbach observes that the "*Sitz einer solchen Barke, dieser sargschwarz lackierte, mattschwarz gepolsterte Armstuhl, der weichste, üppigste, der erschlaffendste Sitz von der Welt ist* [armchair with its coffin-black lacquer and dull black upholstery, is the softest, the most voluptuous, most enervating seat in the world]." <sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 464/*Death in Venice*, 214.

<sup>30</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 464/*Death in Venice*, 214.

Water, the unknown element, traditionally associated with the female and the unconscious, prepares the hero's encounter with the imaginary sphere (I). It is significant that, as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and in Melville's *Moby-Dick*, water serves as the element which brings the hero closer to death. Water functions as the mediating element through which the hero identifies with an image (I) that serves as a substitute for the real thing (R). In Aschenbach's case, as we will see, it is the image of Tadzio (I) which serves as a substitute for the phallic Mother in the realm of the Real (R). In this context, the description of the gondola is symptomatic--with its "*Schnabel* [prow]" rising up "*steil* [steep]" and "*an der Spitze hellebardenartig bewehrt* [armed at its tip like a halberd]," driven by the gondolier, "*der zwischen den Zähnen, stoßweise, in Lauten, die von der Arbeit seiner Arme gepreßt waren, zu sich selber sprach* [whispering and muttering to himself between his teeth, in intermittent grunts pressed out of him by the labour of his arms]." <sup>31</sup> The phallic nature of the gondola gently gliding--not in and out but--through the lagoon, the wet female element, resembles Melville's ever-pitching *Pequod* riding through the waves like an oversized, permanently ejaculating penis. Hence, the phallic

---

<sup>31</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 464/*Death in Venice*, 215.

gondola aiming for the "real thing," the phallic Mother, also confirms Aschenbach's castration.

After his arrival at the hotel, Aschenbach finds himself alone in his hotel room, enjoying the view to the open sea. *"Einsamkeit zeitigt das Originale, das gewagt und befremdend Schöne, das Gedicht. Einsamkeit zeitigt aber auch das Verkehrte, das Unverhältnismäßige, das Absurde und Unerlaubte* [The fruit of solitude is originality, something daringly and disconcertingly beautiful, the poetic creation. But the fruit of solitude can also be the perverse, the disproportionate, the absurd and the forbidden]."<sup>32</sup> Aschenbach soon encounters an image (I) of the forbidden (R) in the form of the entirely beautiful boy Tadzio. The image (I) of the Polish boy immediately impresses the distinguished German author to such a degree that he regrets being seated far away from Tadzio's family during dinner. Aschenbach's identification with Tadzio in the realm of the Imaginary (I) of Lacan's Schéma L [see graphic on page 172] becomes symptomatic in the following list of signifiers.

Tadzio in bildmäßigen Abstand (Mann, GW 8: 479)  
(other)  
alle Lust, alles Entzücken an der Form und am  
Ausdruck (449)  
Spuren imaginärer und geistiger Abenteuer (457)  
sargschwarze Gondel (464)

<sup>32</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 468/*Death in Venice*, 218.

Schnabel der Barke, steil (464)  
 die Blüte des Hauptes in unvergleichlichem Liebreiz,  
     das Haupt des Eros, von gelblichen Schmelze  
     parischen Marmors (474)  
 die schlanke Form, die er im Geiste geschaut (490)  
 ein menschliches Abbild (490)  
 ein reizendes Bild (491)  
 ein Gleichnis der ewigen Schönheit (491)  
 ein gottgleiches Antlitz (491)  
 ein vollkommener Leib (491)  
 Schönheit, die einzige Form des Geistigen (491)  
 die sinnlichen Dinge (491)  
 Ehemalige Gefühle, die sonderbar gewandelt  
     zurückkehrten (495)  
 heikler ist nichts als das Verhältnis von Menschen,  
     die sich nur mit den Augen kennen (496)  
 "Ich liebe Dich!" (498)  
 die voranschwebende Gondel (503)  
 Tadzios Schattenbild (503)  
 Abenteuer der Außenwelt, gesetzlose Hoffnungen (504)  
 Tadzios Erwiderung seines Blickes (510)  
 Versuchung der Außenwelt (511)  
 so schien das Ungeheuliche ihm aussichtsreich (518)  
 das sehnlich verfolgte Bild (520)  
 um den Anblick seiner unziemlichen Hoffnung betrogen  
     (520)  
 eine höchst abgesonderte und verbindungslose  
     Erscheinung (524)  
 Ihm war aber, als ob der bleiche und liebliche  
 Psychagog dort draußen ihm lächle, ihm winke (525)  
     the Imaginary (I)

After a night's rest full of dream images, Aschenbach thought he could smell the "*fauligen Geruch der Lagune* [the stagnant air of the lagoon]." <sup>33</sup> Vexed (by the temptation), he thought about leaving but the god-like beauty of Tadzio convinced him to stay. The boy's appearance ("*die Blüte des Hauptes in unvergleichlichem Liebreiz,--das Haupt des Eros, vom gelblichen Schmelze parischen Marmors* [like a flower in

---

<sup>33</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 472/*Death in Venice*, 221.

bloom, his head was gracefully resting. It was the head of Eros, with the creamy lustre of Parian marble]"<sup>34</sup>) resembles the (phallic) statue we have seen in the description of Melville's Ahab ("His whole high, broad form, seemed made of solid bronze, and shaped in an unalterable mould, like Cellini's cast Perseus") and Ovid's Narcissus ("He was overwhelmed by himself and, unmoving and holding the same expression, he was fixed there like a statue moulded out of Parian marble"). Aschenbach convinces himself that the sea awaits him, and that he should stay as long as Tadzio stays in Venice. The distinguished German author has been hooked to the image (I) of a Polish teenager; Aschenbach's narcissistic identification works at full speed. The pursuit of Tadzio's image marks Aschenbach's symptom ( $\Sigma$ ).

The quest of an image, which characterizes people's symptomatic obsession, has been part of Aschenbach's life from the beginning of the novella. Since the first paragraph, the *motus animi continuus* was driving the German writer. A roving restlessness, a desire to travel drove Aschenbach, he sought "something strange." "[E]in Zug seines Innern, ihm war noch nicht deutlich, wohin, beunruhigte ihn, er studierte Schiffsverbindungen, er blickte suchend umher [He was haunted by an inner impulse

---

<sup>34</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 474/*Death in Venice*, 223.

that still had no clear direction; he studied shipping timetables, looked up one place after another]."<sup>35</sup> By the end of chapter three, the reader and Aschenbach know that it was because of Tadzio that the distinguished author carries out his actions. For the rest of the novella, the quest of Tadzio's image imprints Aschenbach's symptom ( $\Sigma$ ).

The sea, then, functions as a powerful catalyst which brings Aschenbach closer to the forbidden sphere, and ultimately death. The artist loves the sea "*aus einem verbotenen, seiner Aufgabe entgegengesetzten und ebendarum verführerischen Hange zum Ungegliederten [(R)], Maßlosen [(R)], Ewigen [(R)], zum Nichts [(R)]. Am Vollkommenen zu ruhen, ist die Sehnsucht [(R)] dessen, der sich um das Vortreffliche [(S)] müht* [because of the forbidden longing deep within him that ran quite contrary to his life's task and was for that very reason seductive, a longing for the unarticulated and immeasurable, for eternity, for nothingness. To rest in the arms of perfection is the desire of any man intent upon creating excellence]."<sup>36</sup> "To rest in the arms of perfection" is another way of expressing the deadly character of the narcissistic identification with an image. Over and over, Aschenbach will see the image of

---

<sup>35</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 458/*Death in Venice*, 209.

<sup>36</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 475/*Death in Venice*, 224.

Tadzio at the shores of the sea, just as Narcissus saw his mirror image at the spring: water functions as the linking element which seems to connect the imaginary sphere (I) with the Real (R).

"[Tadzio] stand ganz nahe bei Aschenbach, zum ersten Male so nah, daß dieser ihn nicht in bildmäßigem Abstand . . . wahrnahm" [He stood quite near Aschenbach, so near that for the first time the latter was not seeing him as a distant image]."<sup>37</sup> After this encounter, Aschenbach thought--as a result of his *Reaktionsbildung* [reaction formation]--that Tadzio will probably not live to grow old. Aschenbach also noticed "eine widerliche Schwüle [an unpleasant sultriness]," a condition of simultaneous excitement and exhaustion, which urges him again to leave Venice: "Zum zweitenmal und nun endgültig war es erwiesen, daß diese Stadt bei dieser Witterung ihm höchst schädlich war [For the second time, and this time definitely, it had become evident that this city, in this state of weather, was extremely injurious to him]."<sup>38</sup>

Beyond Aschenbach's rationalizing approach which will prove to be too true, a Lacanian reading of *Death in Venice* also captures the symptomatic signifiers that surface. When

---

<sup>37</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 479/*Death in Venice*, 227.

<sup>38</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 480/*Death in Venice*, 228.



Aschenbach leaves Venice, he finds himself on a "*Leidensfahrt, kummervoll, durch alle Tiefen der Reue*" [voyage of sorrow, a grievous passage that plumbed all the depths of regret]."<sup>39</sup> On his trip across the lagoon, he breathed in now in deep, tenderly painful draughts the slightly moldy smell of sea and swamp he had been so anxious to escape from. His departure "*wurde jetzt zum Harm, zum wirklichen Weh, zu einer Seelennot*" [now became grief, became real suffering, an anguish of the soul]."<sup>40</sup> Aschenbach feels overwhelmed to stay in "impossible and forbidden" Venice, the metaphorical realm of desire (R)--and yet, the disturbed writer will return to the place of his doom. Again, the description of Aschenbach's boat resembles that of a phallus pursuing its desired object: "*Schaum vor dem Bug, drollig behend zwischen Gondeln und Dampfern lavierend, schoß das kleine eilfertige Fahrzeug seinem Ziele zu, indes sein einziger Passagier unter der Maske ärgerlicher Resignation die ängstlich-übermütige Erregung eines entlaufenen Knaben verbarg*" [With spray tossing before its bows, deftly and entertainingly tacking to and fro between gondolas and vaporetti, the rapid little boat darted towards its destination, while its only passenger sat

---

<sup>39</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 482/*Death in Venice*, 230.

<sup>40</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 483/*Death in Venice*, 231.

concealing under a mask of resigned annoyance the anxiously exuberant excitement of a truant schoolboy]." <sup>41</sup>

Aschenbach's true feelings surface at the end of chapter three, as soon as he recognizes Tadzio, "*fühlte [Aschenbach] die Begeisterung seines Blutes, die Freude, den Schmerz seiner Seele und erkannte, daß ihm um Tadzio's willen der Abschied so schwer geworden war* [he felt the rapturous kindling of his blood, the joy and the anguish of his soul, and realized that it was because of Tadzio that it had been so hard for him to leave]." <sup>42</sup>

Aschenbach's symptom ( $\Sigma$ ), the pursuit of Tadzio's image, forms a pattern of repetition compulsion until the fatal end. <sup>43</sup> Here is a sample of nine passages in which Aschenbach's symptom is evident: (1) "*Viel, fast beständig sah Aschenbach den Knaben Tadzio* [Aschenbach saw much of the boy Tadzio, he saw him almost constantly]." <sup>44</sup> (2) "*Standbild und Spiegel! Seine Augen umfaßten die edle Gestalt dort am Rande des Blauen, und in aufschwärmendem Entzücken glaubte er mit diesem Blick das Schöne selbst zu begreifen, die Form*

---

<sup>41</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 484-485/*Death in Venice*, 232.

<sup>42</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 486/*Death in Venice*, 233.

<sup>43</sup> Heinrich Holzapfel, *Subversion und Differenz: Das Spiegelmotiv bei Freud, Thomas Mann, Rilke und Jacques Lacan* (Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1986), 65-69 argues that repetition informs the narrative structure of myth.

<sup>44</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 488/*Death in Venice*, 235.

*als Gottesgedanken, die eine und reine Vollkommenheit, die im Geiste lebt und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war* [A mirror and sculptured image! His eyes embraced that noble figure at the blue water's edge, and in rising ecstasy he felt he was gazing on Beauty itself, on Form as thought of God, on the one and pure perfection that dwells in the spirit and of which a human similitude and likeness had here been lightly and graciously set up for him to worship]."<sup>45</sup>

(3) "[D]enn ihn trieb die Manie, den polischen Geschwistern zu folgen [for he was now driven by a mad compulsion to follow the Polish boy and his sisters]."<sup>46</sup> (4) "Denn der Verliebte besorgte nichts, als daß Tadzio abreisen könnte, und erkannte nicht ohne Entsetzen, daß er nicht mehr zu leben wissen werde, wenn das geschähe [For in his enamoured state his one anxiety was that Tadzio might leave, and he realized with a kind of horror that he would not be able to go on living if that were to happen]."<sup>47</sup> (5) "[U]nd er spähte ungezügelter aus nach der voranschwebenden Gondel [and he peered around still more wildly in search of the

---

<sup>45</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 490/*Death in Venice*, 237.

<sup>46</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 499/*Death in Venice*, 245.

<sup>47</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 501/*Death in Venice*, 246.

gondola that hovered ahead]."48 (6) "[U]nd es war dahin gekommen, daß der Verliebte fürchten mußte, auffällig geworden und beargwöhnt zu sein [and at the point things had now reached, the enamoured Aschenbach had reason to fear that he had attracted attention and aroused suspicion]."49

(7) "Tadzio blieb; und jenem, in seiner Umfängenheit, war es zuweilen, als könne Flucht und Tod alles störende Leben in der Runde entfernen und er allein mit dem Schönen auf dieser Insel zurückbleiben [Tadzio stayed on; and to Aschenbach, in his beleaguered state, it sometimes seemed that all these unwanted people all around him might flee from the place or die, that every living being might disappear and leave him alone on this island with the beautiful boy]."50 (8)

"Berauscht von dieser Erkenntnis, von diesen Augen vorwärts gelockt, am Narrenseile geleitet von der Passion, stahl der Verliebte sich seiner unziemlichen Hoffnung nach--und sah sich schließlich dennoch um ihren Anblick betrogen [Drunk with excitement as he realized this, lured onward by those eyes, helpless in the leading strings of his mad desire, the infatuated Aschenbach stole upon the trail of his unseemly

---

48 Mann, *GW*, 8: 503/*Death in Venice*, 248.

49 Mann, *GW*, 8: 507/*Death in Venice*, 252.

50 Mann, *GW*, 8: 518/*Death in Venice*, 261.

hope--only to find it vanish from his sight in the end]."<sup>51</sup>  
 (9) "*Und, wie so oft, machte er sich auf, ihm zu folgen* [And as so often, he set out to follow him]."<sup>52</sup>

At the beginning of chapter four, charming Venice is painted as a strange and wonderful city. "*Nur dieser Ort verzauberte ihn, entspannte sein Wollen* [Only this place bewitched him, relaxed his will]."<sup>53</sup> Recalling, among other things, the moment when he reclined under "a star-strewn sky on the cushion of a gondola," Gustav von Aschenbach felt "*als sei er entrückt ins elysische Land, an die Grenzen der Erde, wo leichtestes Leben den Menschen beschert ist* [he had been snatched away now to the Elysian land, to the ends of the earth, where lightest of living is granted to mortals]."<sup>54</sup> The cause of Aschenbach's joy was of course the beautiful boy Tadzio whom he saw constantly. Although the German author did not understand a word of what Tadzio said, he soon knew every line and pose of Tadzio's body, "*und fand der Bewunderung, der zarten Sinneslust kein Ende* [and there was no end to his wonder, to the delicate delight of his

---

<sup>51</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 520/*Death in Venice*, 263.

<sup>52</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 525/*Death in Venice*, 267.

<sup>53</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 487/*Death in Venice*, 235.

<sup>54</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 488/*Death in Venice*, 235.

senses."<sup>55</sup> Aschenbach is not adoring a person but merely an image (I):

[U]nd in aufschwärmendem Entzücken glaubte er mit diesem Blick das Schöne selbst zu begreifen, die Form als Gottesgedanken, die eine und reine Vollkommenheit, die im Geiste lebt und von der ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis hier leicht und hold zur Anbetung aufgerichtet war. Das war der Rausch; und unbedenklich, ja gierig hieß der alternde Künstler ihn willkommen. Sein Geist kreißte, seine Bildung geriet ins Wallen, sein Gedächtnis warf uralte, seiner Jugend überlieferte und bis dahin niemals von eigenem Feuer belebte Gedanken auf.

[A]nd in rising ecstasy he felt he was gazing on Beauty itself, on Form as a thought of God, on the one and pure perfection that dwells in the spirit and of which a human similitude and likeness had here been lightly and graciously set up for him to worship. Such was his emotional intoxication; and the ageing artist welcomed it unhesitatingly, even greedily. His mind was in labour, its store of culture was in ferment, his memory threw up thoughts from ancient tradition which he had been taught as a boy, but which had never yet come alive in his own fire.<sup>56</sup>

These few sentences form another rich passage which again captures all the different spheres of Aschenbach's narcissistic structure. His "rising ecstasy," his "emotional intoxication," his culture being "in ferment," and his "fiery" thoughts all contribute to express his desire as it can be schematized in the field of the Real (R)

---

<sup>55</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 489/*Death in Venice*, 236.

<sup>56</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 490/*Death in Venice*, 237.

in Lacan's Schéma L. Because Aschenbach's (incestuous) desire can never be fulfilled, he seeks "*ein menschliches Abbild und Gleichnis* [a human similitude and likeness" in the field of the Imaginary (I) which he set up for himself to worship. Again, Tadzio is compared to a (phallic) statue Aschenbach can vicariously adore. From his own experience as an artist, he knew the will or desire which had created "*dies göttliche Bildwerk, . . . wenn er, nüchterner Leidenschaft voll, aus der Marmormasse der Sprache die schlanke Form befreite, die er im Geiste geschaut und die er als Standbild und Spiegel geistiger Schönheit den Menschen darstellte* [this divine sculptured shape . . . in the sober passion that filled him as he set free from the marble mass of language that slender form he had beheld in the spirit, and which he was presenting to mankind as a mirror and sculptured image of intellectual beauty."<sup>57</sup>

In a rhetorical question, Aschenbach contemplates whether the pure will--or desire (R)--that had been active in creating the sculpture, was not also active in him as--in sober passion--he set free from the marble mass of language (S) that slender form he had beheld in the spirit (I). In other words, the marble mass of language functions as the castrating element in the field of the Symbolic (S),

---

<sup>57</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 490/*Death in Venice*, 237.

curtailing the real thing (R) which finds its expression only through a spiritual image in the spirit (I). A few lines later, it is explained: "*Amor fürwahr tat es den Mathematikern gleich, die unfähigen Kindern greifbare Bilder der reinen Formen vorzeigen* [That Cupid, indeed, does as mathematicians do, when they show dull-witted children tangible images of the pure Forms]."<sup>58</sup> An enthusiastic Aschenbach is inspired by a "*reizendes Bild*," a vision (I) spurning his desire (R). What follows, the parable of Socrates instructing Phaedrus on desire (R) and virtue (S), explains the metaphorical relationship between the Real (R) and the Imaginary (I) even further:

Er sprach ihm von dem heißen Erschrecken, das der Fühlende leidet, wenn sein Auge ein Gleichnis der ewigen Schönheit erblickt; sprach ihm von den Begierden des Weihelosen und Schlechten, der die Schönheit nicht denken kann, wenn er ihr Abbild sieht und der Ehrfurcht nicht fähig ist; sprach von der heiligen Angst, die den Edlen befällt, wenn ein gottgleiches Antlitz, ein vollkommener Leib ihm erscheint,--wie er dann aufbebt und außer sich ist und hinzusehen sich kaum getraut und den verhehrt, der die Schönheit hat, ja, ihm opfern würde wie einer Bildsäule, wenn er nicht fürchten müßte, den Menschen närrisch zu erscheinen.

He spoke to him of the burning tremor of fear which the lover will suffer when his eye perceives a likeness of eternal Beauty; spoke to him of the lusts of the profane and base who cannot turn their eyes to Beauty when they behold its image and are not capable of reverence; spoke of the sacred terror that visits the noble soul when a god-like countenance, a perfect body

---

<sup>58</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 491/*Death in Venice*, 238.



appears to him--of how he trembles then and is beside himself and hardly dares look at the possessor of beauty, and reveres him and would even sacrifice to him as to a graven image, if he did not fear to seem foolish in the eyes of men.<sup>59</sup>

Visual beauty, Socrates concludes in Aschenbach's fantasy about the "most secret voluptuousness of the heart", is "the only form of the spiritual that we can receive with our senses and endure with our senses." The story of Semele may also illustrate the point that people cannot bear "the real thing." Semele perished when she desired to experience Zeus as the ultimate Father.

Gustav von Aschenbach indulges in his desire and recoils from approaching and talking to Tadzio. "*Allein es war wohl an dem, daß der Alternde die Ernüchterung nicht wollte, daß der Rausch ihm zu teuer war* [But the fact now seemed to be that the ageing lover no longer wished to be disenchanted, that the intoxication was too precious to him]."<sup>60</sup> After another dream scene in which the sea is described in a number of sexual metaphors, we learn that "[e]hemalige Gefühle, frühe, köstliche Drangsale des Herzens, die im strengen Dienst seines Lebens erstorben waren und nun so sonderbar gewandelt zurückkehrten [feelings

---

<sup>59</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 491/*Death in Venice*, 238.

<sup>60</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 494/*Death in Venice*, 240.

he had long ago, early and precious dolours of the heart, which had died out in his life's austere service and were now, so strangely transformed, returning to him]." <sup>61</sup> The strange transformation of Aschenbach's (incestuous) desire (R) into a longing for an imaginary object (I) finds its expression in his compulsive wish to adore Tadzio's image. "*Seltsamer, heikler ist nichts als das Verhältnis von Menschen, die sich nur mit den Augen kennen* [Nothing is stranger, more delicate, than the relationship between people who know each other only by sight]," the narrator of *Death in Venice* concludes. <sup>62</sup> The longing for the imaginary object causes "*Unruhe und überreizte Neugier, die Hysterie eines unbefriedigten, unnatürlich unterdrückten Erkenntnis- und Austauschbedürfnisses* [uneasiness and overstimulated curiosity, the nervous excitement of an unsatisfied, unnaturally suppressed need to know and to communicate]." <sup>63</sup> The closing statement of this paragraph is all too revealing: "[D]esire is born of defective knowledge." This is true in a double way: on the one hand, knowledge and culture are the forces in the symbolic sphere (S) repressing desire in the field of the Real (R) and channeling it back

---

<sup>61</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 495/*Death in Venice*, 242.

<sup>62</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 496/*Death in Venice*, 243.

<sup>63</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 496/*Death in Venice*, 243.

to the symbolic sphere of the intellect (S); so if the moral forces of culture are not rigid enough, desire will surface in the sphere of the Imaginary (I). On the other hand, even if one knew about the mechanism of culture and the incest prohibition, one could not really escape these universal laws which repress the individual's desire. As a result, it is safe to say that desire will always emerge, and it is up to the human subject to deal with the consequences.

Towards end of chapter four of *Death in Venice*, Aschenbach's facial expression is described as not revealing any inner emotion; he pretends to be busy when waiting daily for Tadzio's appearance. Intellectuals, such as Aschenbach, and all other mortals face the dilemma that "*das Wort die sinnliche Schönheit nur zu preisen, nicht wiederzugeben vermag* [language can only praise sensuous beauty, but not reproduce it]." <sup>64</sup> Furthermore, language, epitomizing the field of the Symbolic (S), can never really capture "sensuous beauty," located in its raw, unattainable form in the field of the Real (R) and in its substituted, graspable form in the field of the Imaginary (I). According to Ferdinand de Saussure, language is a set of signifiers only circumscribing but never obtaining the real thing. Chapter four of *Death in Venice* ends with Aschenbach's "Narcissus

---

<sup>64</sup> Mann, GW, 8: 498/*Death in Venice*, 244.

scene" which I cited at the beginning of this chapter. Aschenbach was so disturbed, so deeply shaken by his desire for Tadzio that he whispered the standing formula of the heart's desire: "I love you!"

By the beginning of Thomas Mann's final chapter, Aschenbach was "driven by a mad compulsion [*Manie*] to follow the Polish boy." While Asiatic cholera was spreading through Venice, the beguiled lover indulges in his passion (R), neglecting his knowledge (S) about the dangerous plague. "*Denn der Leidenschaft ist, wie dem Verbrechen, die gesicherte Ordnung und Wohlfahrt des Alltags nicht gemäß, und jede Lockerung des bürgerlichen Gefüges, jede Verwirrung und Heimsuchung der Welt muß ihr willkommen sein* [For to passion, as to crime, the assured everyday order and stability of things is not opportune, and any weakening of the civil structure, any chaos and disaster afflicting the world must be welcome to it]," the narrator rightly states.<sup>65</sup> As observed before, Aschenbach is torn between the two poles of passion (R) and the stability of things, the civil structure (S). But possessed by what Freud would call "death drive," Aschenbach is not concerned about his health but anxious that Tadzio might leave, "*und erkannte nicht ohne Entsetzen, daß er nicht mehr zu leben wissen werde,*

---

<sup>65</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 500/*Death in Venice*, 246.

wenn das geschähe [and he realized with a kind of horror that he would not be able to go on living if that were to happen]." <sup>66</sup> One way or the other, the distinguished German author is going to die as he had begun pursuing Tadzio more aggressively, following him obtrusively. Whenever Aschenbach lost sight of the boy, he would then have to endure "minutes of mortal embarrassment."

"[C]hained to his pursuit by his infatuation," Aschenbach would peer around still more wildly in search of Tadzio. *"So wußte und wollte denn der Verwirrte nichts anderes mehr, als den Gegenstand, der ihn entzündete, ohne Unterlaß zu verfolgen, von ihm zu träumen, wenn er abwesend war, und nach der Weise der Liebenden seinem bloßen Schattenbild [I] zärtliche Worte zu geben. Einsamkeit, Fremde und das Glück eines späten und tiefen Rausches [R] ermutigten und überredeten ihn, sich auch das Befremdlichste ohne Scheu und Erröten [S] durchgehen zu lassen [So it was that in his state of distraction he could no longer think of anything or want anything except this ceaseless pursuit of the object that so inflamed him: nothing but to follow him, to dream of him when he was not there, and after the fashion of lovers to address tender words to his mere shadow. Solitariness, the foreign environment, and the joy of an*

---

<sup>66</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 501/*Death in Venice*, 246. On suicide as a way of "solving" one's problems see Dettmerring, 9-20.

intoxication of feeling that had come to him so late and affected him so profoundly--all this encouraged and persuaded him to indulge himself in the most astonishing ways]." <sup>67</sup>

Deeply intoxicated by his passion (R) and no longer restrained by the morals (S) of society (*ohne Scheu und ohne Erröten*), Aschenbach pursues Tadzio's image (I), his shadow. He experiences his extravagances of feeling as "impermissible," according to the cultural laws (S), but the disreputable events (*unsaubere Vorgänge*) in the depths of Venice nourished "*seine Leidenschaft mit unbestimmten, gesetzlosen Hoffnungen* [his passion with vague and lawless hopes]." <sup>68</sup> *atqui vivere, Lucili, militare est*, Seneca says in his letter 96.5 to Lucilius, and in his steadfast and frugal life of self-conquest and defiant resolve Aschenbach seems to continuously struggle in coping with his passion. <sup>69</sup>

Aschenbach finds himself conscious of having a special claim to participation in this secret, and yet excluded from a grasp of desire (R). Passion (R) paralyzes Aschenbach's discriminatory senses (S). "*In der allgemeinen Bewegung und Zerstreuung wagte er es, zu Tadzio hinüberzublicken, und*

---

<sup>67</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 503/*Death in Venice*, 248.

<sup>68</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 504/*Death in Venice*, 250.

<sup>69</sup> Seneca, [*Letters to Lucilius*], ed. Otto Hense (Leipzig: Teubner, 1938).

indem er es tat, durfte er bemerken, daß der Schöne, in Erwiderung seines Blickes, ebenfalls ernst blieb, ganz so, als richte er Verhalten und Miene nach der des anderen und als vermöge die allgemeine Stimmung nichts über ihn, da jener sich ihr entzog [In the general commotion and distraction he ventured to steal a glance at Tadzio, and as he did so he became aware that the boy, returning his glance, had remained no less serious than himself, just as if he were regulating his attitude and expression by those of the older man]."<sup>70</sup> Aschenbach's glance at Tadzio reminds of Narcissus's fascination with his mirror image. The mere thought of giving up the idolized image filled Thomas Mann's protagonist with repugnance.

Aschenbach's following dream of shrieking women bearing up their own breasts in both hands implies the incestuous nature of his desire.<sup>71</sup> In his dream, odors and the scent of panting bodies besieged Aschenbach's mind. At this point, sweet and wild sounds and flute music enticed Aschenbach "*schamlos beharrlich zum Fest und Unmaß des äußersten Opfers* [with shameless insistence to the feast and the frenzy of

---

<sup>70</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 510/*Death in Venice*, 255.

<sup>71</sup> Manfred Dierks, *Studien zu Mythos und Psychologie bei Thomas Mann* (Bern: 1972), 31f., cited after Holzapfel, 204, has demonstrated that Aschenbach suffers the fate of Pentheus in Euripides' *Bacchae*.

the uttermost surrender]." <sup>72</sup> The adjective "shameless" marks another signifier which aims at the violation of the incest prohibition. While the first phrase could be associated with Freud's sex drive, the second phrase indicates the death drive and Aschenbach's uttermost surrender (*Opfer*) of his life. A dizzying "lust" seized the 50-year old, his soul craved to join the round-dance of the god Priapus as the context of the obscene symbol, wooden and gigantic, reveals. Enthusiastically dancing men raged with foaming mouths, they roused each other with lewd gestures and licentious hands: "*Und seine Seele kostete Unzucht und Raserei des Untergangs* [And his very soul savoured the lascivious delirium of annihilation]." <sup>73</sup> Politely circumscribing Aschenbach's desire, the English translator hesitated to use the term incest but the German text unmistakably says "Unzucht." The German word "Unzucht [sexual offense]" does not necessarily exclude "Inzucht [incest]."

Aschenbach's dream presupposes his death, Tadzio's staying on in Venice does not affect the artist's desire to stay in a cholera infested environment: "[U]nd jenem, in seiner Unbefangenheit, war es zuweilen, als könne Flucht und

---

<sup>72</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 517/*Death in Venice*, 260.

<sup>73</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 517/*Death in Venice*, 261.



*Tod alles störende Leben in der Runde entfernen und er allein mit dem Schönen auf dieser Insel zurückbleiben* [and to Aschenbach, in his beleaguered state, it sometimes seemed that all these unwanted people all around him might flee from the place or die, that every living being might disappear and leave him alone on this island with the beautiful boy]."<sup>74</sup> As in Narcissus's case, death seems to be the solution to unite with the image of the lover. At this stage, monstrous things, such as a city full of dying people, seemed full of promise to Aschenbach, the moral law (S) no longer valid.

Overcome by desire, and following the footsteps of the beautiful boy, Aschenbach had plunged into the depths of the sick city, "*durchaus darauf bedacht, das sehnlich verfolgte Bild nicht aus den Augen zu verlieren* [intent above all on not losing sight of the vision he so passionately pursued]."<sup>75</sup> Drunk with excitement, the German writer pursues Tadzio's image (I), "*von diesen Augen vorwärts gelockt, am Narrenseile geleitet von der Passion, stahl der Verliebte sich seiner unziemlichen Hoffnung nach--und sah sich schließlich doch um ihren Anblick betrogen* [lured onwards by those eyes, helpless in the leading strings of

---

<sup>74</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 518/*Death in Venice*, 261.

<sup>75</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 520/*Death in Venice*, 263.

his mad desire, the infatuated Aschenbach stole upon the trail of his unseemly hope--only to find it vanish from his sight in the end]."<sup>76</sup> Like Ovid's Narcissus, Aschenbach ultimately finds himself betrayed in his search for the image. In these moments, Aschenbach finds himself at the edge of a well--and disaster: "*Der Brunnen ist der Spiegel des Narziß! Das Bild des schönen Jünglings, das den imaginären Rausch des zuvor asketischen Künstlers hervorruft, stürzt ihn in einen tödlichen Selbstverlust, als er sich seinem Bilde gleich machen will und die Maskierung eines falschen Jünglings annimmt* [The well is the mirror of Narcissus! The image of the beautiful youth, which causes the imaginary intoxication of the previously ascetic artist, hurls him into a deadly loss of his self when he wants to imitate the youth's image and adopts the mask of a false youth]."<sup>77</sup> By emulating his mirror image, Aschenbach has created the illusion of his ego's unity with the (mirror) image which entails the constant danger of falling back into chaos. Confronted with the danger of the possible loss, the human subject attempts to recreate the experience of the masked unity with the image--and is reminded of the gap between his or her ego and that of the image.

---

<sup>76</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 520/*Death in Venice*, 263.

<sup>77</sup> Holzapfel, 205.

A few days later, Gustav von Aschenbach had a "Gefühl der Ausweg- und Aussichtslosigkeit, von dem nicht klar wurde, ob es sich auf die äußere Welt oder auf seine eigene Existenz bezog [feeling of hopelessness and pointlessness, though he could not decide whether this referred to the external world or his personal existence]." <sup>78</sup> When he learns that Tadzio's family was about to leave Venice, Aschenbach went down to the sea--with the "mirroring" water being the catalytic element in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, and Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig*. In this "hour of leave-taking," Aschenbach perceives Tadzio as a "höchst abgesonderte und verbindungslose Erscheinung [(I)] [quite isolated and unrelated apparition]." <sup>79</sup> For a last time, their looks meet--along the lines of Lacan's imaginary relationship. Recognizing Tadzio's *Blick*, it seemed to Aschenbach as if the "bleiche und liebliche Psychagog dort draußen ihm lächele, ihm winke [lovely soul-summoner out there were smiling to him, beckoning to him]." <sup>80</sup> And as so often, Aschenbach set out to follow his desire (R) personified in the boy's image (I). At this moment,

---

<sup>78</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 522-523/*Death in Venice*, 265.

<sup>79</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 524/*Death in Venice*, 267.

<sup>80</sup> Mann, *GW*, 8: 525/*Death in Venice*, 267.

Aschenbach collapsed and would not wake up again--just as  
Ovid's Narcissus quietly passed away.

## VI. CONCLUSION: THE NARCISSISTIC STRUCTURE

The psychoanalytic reading of the Narcissus myth as a literary case has brought about a fuller understanding of the underlying structure, which is generally valid beyond the study of specific influences of the myth. Narcissism is not a "personality disorder" as the American Psychiatric Association claims; the definition of narcissism as illness unfortunately perpetuates a very limited view which does not recognize the structural aspect of this phenomenon. As the title of this dissertation indicates, and as we have seen throughout the discussion of various theoretical models and literary texts, narcissism first and foremost resembles a configuration that potentially affects every member of any society which bases its culture on incest prohibition.

The narcissistic structure affects individuals to different degrees but a psychoanalysis of actual people would go beyond the scope, and cannot be the goal, of this literary study. No one adhering to the basic law of incest prohibition can escape this arrangement; there are only more and less successful ways of dealing with the narcissistic form of the human subject. The myth of Narcissus and the myth of Oedipus characterize two ways of dealing with the narcissistic structure in a frustrating manner. More successful approaches may be developed in the future, once people have examined the interaction between the human psyche and general cultural norms more closely.

The discussion of various theoretical approaches to myth, literature and the human psyche in chapter two has identified the Lacanian approach as the most appropriate concept to illuminate the narcissistic structure of the human subject. As a consequence, this study has an impact on literary theory by sharpening the theoretical framework in the large pool of theoretical schools; future studies should recognize the theoretical and methodological value of a Lacanian reading of the myth of Narcissus for work in literary study. Jacques Lacan's Schéma L has proven to represent a theoretical paradigm which allows us to work out the narcissistic configuration as it appears in many literary works. Lacan's model is not so much a tool to analyze a text but rather a graphic illustration of the underlying structures which affect human subjects in any culture that prohibits incest. Lacan's Schéma L thus furnishes the graphic representation of a theme, the Narcissus theme, which can be found in texts from different national literatures, genres, and time periods.

Lacan's Schéma L captures the four fundamental exigencies of the narcissistic structure, namely the incest prohibition in the field of the Symbolic (S), the incestuous desire for the phallic Mother in the field of the Real (R) as a result of this prohibition, the displacement of this desire for another imaginary object in the field of the

Imaginary (I), and the obsessive quest of that image as the symptom ( $\Sigma$ ) that holds the three previous fields together.

The body of this project has shown the workability of Lacan's theoretical paradigm in practice. The discussion of various literary works in chapters three through five has shown the extent to which the narcissistic configuration of the human subject coincides with representations in literature. In chapter three, Ovid's Narcissus does not meet his (incestuous) desire in the realm of the Real (R) but pursues his mirror image in the sphere of the Imaginary (I). Water apparently serves as a catalyst of the subject's obsession ( $\Sigma$ ) which entails his narcissistic identification and, ultimately, leads to suicide. The source of this deadly mechanism has to be located in the field of the Symbolic (S) where the laws of culture, i.e., incest prohibition and language, have symbolically castrated the human subject from the beginning.

My thesis that the narcissistic structure, encountered in the behavior of human beings, manifests itself in several kinds of literary texts is proven in chapters four and five. Both Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* and Thomas Mann's *Der Tod in Venedig* [*Death in Venice*] serve as examples of two modern literary texts in English and German literature where the myth of Narcissus is neither an explicit nor an implied theme. Yet castration, desire, and obsession with one's narcissistic identification mark the common points of

Captain Ahab's and Gustav von Aschenbach's narcissistic configuration which prevails as a structure of literary figures--and human subjects--beyond the realm of influence study.

As for potential social value, knowledge about the mechanisms of the narcissistic structure will lead to a better understanding of certain universal truths such as the general nature of human neuroses, the concomitant problems in human relationships, and the violence and bad habits of human beings in society. Since the incest prohibition affects everybody, all of us have to deal with the narcissistic structure of the human subject at some point in our lives lest we become ignorant victims of these universal mechanisms. Even though this project focuses on only a few literary texts, the dimension of this study, with its implications for scholars in literature and students of the human psyche, stretches beyond defined academic fields.



## REFERENCES

- Adams, Jeffrey, and Eric Williams, eds. *Mimetic Desire: Essays on Narcissism in German Literature from Romanticism to Post Modernism*. Columbia, SC: Camden House, 1995.
- Alcorn, Marshall W. *Narcissism and the Literary Libido: Rhetoric, Text, and Subjectivity*. New York: New York University Press, 1994.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-II)*. 2nd ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1968.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)*. 3rd ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1980.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III-R)*. 3rd revised ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1987.
- American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV)*. 4th ed. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 1994.
- Andreas-Salomé, Lou. "The Dual Orientation of Narcissism." Translated by Stanley A. Leavy. In *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 31 (1962): 1-30.
- Andreas-Salomé, Lou. *The Freud Journal*. Translated by Stanley A. Leavy. New York: Basic Books, 1964. Originally published as *In der Schule bei Freud* (Zurich: Max Niehans Verlag, 1958).
- Andreas-Salomé, Lou. "Narzissmus als Doppelrichtung." In *Lou Andreas-Salomé: Das 'zweideutige' Lächeln der Erotik. Texte zur Psychoanalyse*. Edited by Inge Weber and Brigitte Rempp. Freiburg: Kore, 1990. Originally published in *Imago* 7 (1921): 361-386.
- Ausführliches Lexikon der griechischen und römischen Mythologie*. Edited by Wilhelm H. Roscher. 7 vols. 1884-1937. 2nd reprint. Hildesheim: Olms, 1977-1978.

- Austin, Norman. *Meaning and Being in Myth*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1990.
- Berlin, Jeffrey B. "Psychoanalysis, Freud, and Thomas Mann." In *Approaches to Teaching Mann's Death in Venice and Other Short Fiction*. Edited by Jeffrey B. Berlin. New York: Modern Language Association, 1992.
- Berman, Jeffrey. *Narcissism and the Novel*. New York: New York University Press, 1990.
- Bömer, Franz. P. Ovidius Naso. *Metamorphosen. Kommentar*. 7 vols. Heidelberg: Winter, 1969-1986.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. *The Empathic Reader: A Study of the Narcissistic Character and the Drama of the Self*. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989.
- Brenkman, John. "Narcissus in the Text." *Georgia Review* 30 (1976): 293-327.
- Burgess, Ann Wolbert and Lynda Lytle Holmstrom. "Assessing Trauma in the Rape Victim." *American Journal of Nursing* 75 (1975): 1288-1291.
- Cancik, Hubert. "Spiegel der Erkenntnis." *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 10 (1967): 42-53.
- Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Edited by Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Culler, Jonathan D. *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982.
- Curtius, Mechthild. *Erotische Phantasien bei Thomas Mann: Wälsungenblut - Bekenntnisse des Hochstaplers Felix Krull - Der Erwählte - Die vertauschten Köpfe - Joseph in Ägypten*. Königstein, Taunus: Athenäum, 1984.
- Dettmerring, Peter. *Dichtung und Psychoanalyse: Thomas Mann, Rainer Maria Rilke, Richard Wagner*. Munich: Nymphenburger Verlagshandlung, 1969.
- Eagleton, Terry. *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983.
- Edgeworth, Robert J. *The Colors of the Aeneid*. New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

- Ellmann, Maud, ed. *Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism*. London: Longman, 1994.
- Essential Papers on Narcissism*. Edited by Andrew P. Morrison. New York: New York University Press, 1986.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Gesammelte Werke: Chronologisch geordnet*. 18 vols. 1940-1968. Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer, 1973-1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*. Translated and edited by James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1953-1974.
- Goeppert, Herma and Sebastian. "Zum Verständnis von Sprache und Übertragung in Becketts Endspiel." In *Psychoanalytische und psychopathologische Literaturinterpretationen*. Edited by Bernd Urban and Winfried Kudzus. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1981.
- Graf, Fritz. *Greek Mythology: An Introduction*. Translated by Thomas Marier. 1993. Reprint, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1996. Originally published as *Griechische Mythologie. Eine Einführung* (Munich: Artemis, 1987).
- Hamilton, Victoria. *Narcissus and Oedipus: The Children of Psychoanalysis*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982.
- Holland, Norman N. *Holland's Guide to Psychoanalytic Psychology and Literature-and-Psychology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Holland, Norman N. "Unity Identity Test Self." *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 90 (1975): 813-822.
- Hollander, John. *The Figure of Echo*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981.
- Holzappel, Heinrich. *Subversion und Differenz: Das Spiegelmotiv bei Freud, Thomas Mann, Rilke und Jacques Lacan*. Essen: Verlag Die Blaue Eule, 1986.
- Irey, Eugene F. *A Concordance to Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*. 2 vols. New York: Garland, 1982.
- Jacoby, Felix. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker (FGrHist)*. 3 parts. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1926- .

- Kernberg, Otto. *Borderline Conditions and Psychological Narcissism*. New York: Jason Aronson, 1975.
- Kiefer, Otto. *Sexual Life in Ancient Rome*. Translated by Gilbert and Helen Highet. London: George Routledge, 1934. Reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1975. Originally published as *Kulturgeschichte Roms unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der römischen Sitten*.
- Knoespel, Kenneth Jacob. *Narcissus and the Invention of Personal History*. New York: Garland, 1985.
- Kochhar-Lindgren, Gray. *Narcissus Transformed: The Textual Subject in Psychoanalysis and Literature*. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1993.
- Kohut, Heinz, and Ernest S. Wolf. "The Disorders of the Self and Their Treatment: An Outline." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 59 (1978): 413-425.
- Kohut, Heinz. "Forms and Transformations of Narcissism." *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 14 (1966): 243-272.
- Kohut, Heinz. *How Does Analysis Cure?*. Edited by Arnold Goldberg, with the collaboration of Paul Stephansky. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.
- Kohut, Heinz. *The Analysis of the Self*. New York: International Universities Press, 1971.
- Kohut, Heinz. *The Restoration of the Self*. New York: International Universities Press, 1977.
- Lacan, Jacques. "Conférences et entretiens dans des universités nord-américaines." *Scilicet* 6-7 (1976): 5-63.
- Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits. A Selection*. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: W. W. Norton: 1977. Originally published as *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1966).
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Neurotic's Individual Myth." Translated by Martha Noel Evans. *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 48 (1979): 405-425. Originally published as "Le mythe individuel du névrosé." 1953. Text established by Jacques-Alain Miller. *Ornicar?* 17/18 (1979): 289-307.
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book 1. Freud's Papers on Technique, 1953-1954*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller.

- Translated by John Forrester. 1988. Reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991. Originally published as *Le Séminaire I* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1975).
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar. Book 2. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Sylvana Tomaselli. New York: W. W. Norton, 1988. Originally published as *Le Séminaire II* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1978).
- Lacan, Jacques. *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book 7: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller. Translated by Dennis Porter. New York: W. W. Norton: 1992. Originally published as *Le Séminaire VII* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986).
- Lacan, Jacques. *Television*. Edited by Joan Copjec. Translated by Dennis Hollier, Rosalind Kraus, and Annette Michelson. New York: W. W. Norton: 1990. Originally published as *Télévision* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1974).
- Lactantius. *Commentarii*. Edited by Richard Jahnke. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1898.
- Laplanche, Jean, and J.-B. Pontalis. *The Language of Psycho-Analysis*. Translated by Donald Nicholson-Smith. New York: W. W. Norton, 1973. Originally published as *Vocabulaire de la Psychanalyse* ([Paris]: Presses Universitaires de France, 1967).
- Lasch, Christopher. *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*. 1979. Reprint, New York: W. W. Norton, 1991.
- Layton, Lynne, and Barbara Ann Schapiro, eds. *Narcissism and the Text: Studies in Literature and the Psychology of Self*. New York: New York University Press, 1986.
- Layton, Lynne. "From Oedipus to Narcissus: Literature and the Psychology of the Self." *Mosaic* 18 (1985): 97-105.
- Lee, Jonathan Scott. *Jacques Lacan*. 1990. Reprint, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991.
- Leupin, Alexandre, ed. *Lacan and the Human Sciences*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1991.

- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. *Structural Anthropology*. 2 vols. Translated by Monique Layton. New York: Basic Books, 1976.
- Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*. Edited by Shoshana Felman. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. Originally published as *Yale French Studies* 55/56 (1977).
- Manuwald, Bernd. "Narcissus bei Konon und Ovid." *Hermes* 103 (1975): 349-372.
- Mann, Thomas. *Death in Venice and Other Stories*. Translated by David Luke. London: Secker and Warburg, 1990.
- Mann, Thomas. *Gesammelte Werke*. 12 vols. [Frankfurt/Main]: S. Fischer Verlag, 1960.
- Marcuse, Herbert. *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud*. 1955. Reprint, Boston: Beacon, 1974.
- Medea: Essays on Medea in Myth, Literature, Philosophy, and Art*. Edited by James J. Clauss and Sarah Iles Johnston. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Melville, Herman. *Moby Dick: or The Whale*. Edited by Harrison Hayford et al. Vol. 6 of *The Writings of Herman Melville*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988.
- Miller, Alice. *Das Drama des begabten Kindes und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst*. 1979. Reprint, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983.
- Miller, Alice. *Prisoners of Childhood*. Translated by Ruth Ward. New York: Basic Books, 1981.
- Miller, Alice. "Depression and Grandiosity as Related Forms of Narcissistic Disturbances." *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 6 (1979): 61-76.
- Die neuen Narzißmustheorien: Zurück ins Paradies?* Edited by Psychoanalytisches Seminar Zürich. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat, 1981. Reprint, Hamburg: Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 1993.
- Nicklas, Hans W. *Thomas Manns Novelle Der Tod in Venedig: Analyse des Motivzusammenhangs und der Erzählstruktur*. Marburg: N. G. Elwert Verlag, 1968.

- Otis, Brooks. *Ovid as an Epic Poet*. 2nd ed. 1966. Reprint, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970.
- Ovid. *Amores. Medicamina Faciei Femineae. Ars Amatoria. Remedia Amoris*. Edited by E. J. Kenney. 1961. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Ovid. *The Art of Love, and Other Poems*. Translated by J. H. Mozley. 2nd ed. 1929. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Edited by William S. Anderson. 4th ed. 1977. Leipzig: Teubner, 1988.
- Ovid. *Metamorphoses 1-4*. Edited and translated by D. H. Hill. Warminster, Wiltshire: Aris and Phillips, 1985.
- Oxford Latin Dictionary*. Edited by P. G. W. Glare. 1968. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982.
- Paulys Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. 24 vols. Edited by Georg Wissowa et al. Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1894-1963.
- Pausanias. *Pausaniae Graeciae Descriptio*. Edited by Hermann Hitzig and Hugo Blümner. 3 vols. 1896. Reprint of the edition Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1907-1910, Hildesheim: G. Olms, 1984.
- Pausanias. *Description of Greece*. Translated by W. H. S. Jones. 5 vols. 1918. Reprint, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.
- Pfandl, Ludwig. "Der Narzißbegriff-Versuch einer neuen Deutung." *Imago* 21 (1935): 279-310.
- Pliny. *C. Plinius Secundus Naturalis Historia*. Edited by L. Ian and C. Mayhoff. 7 vols. 1892. Reprint, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1967.
- Pliny. *Natural History*. Translated by H. Rackham. 10 vols. Vols. 6-8 translated by W. H. S. Jones. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1938-1965.
- Rank, Otto. "Der Doppelgänger." *Imago* 3 (1914): 97-164.
- Reed, Gail S. "Toward a Methodology for Applying Psychoanalysis to Literature." *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 51 (1982): 19-42.

- Reid, Jane D. *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300-1990s*. 2 vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Rimbaud, Arthur. *Complete Works, Selected Letters*. Translated by Wallace Fowlie. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Schellenbaum, Peter. *Das Nein in der Liebe: Abgrenzung und Hingabe in der erotischen Beziehung*. 7th ed. Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1984. Reprint, Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuchverlag, 1990.
- Schlagmann, Klaus. *Die Wahrheit über Narziß, Iokaste, Ödipus und Norbert Hanold: Versuch einer konstruktiven Streitschrift*. Saarbrücken: Verlag Der Stammbaum und die Sieben Zweige/Klaus Schlagmann, 1996.
- Seneca. [Letters to Lucilius]. Edited by Otto Hense. Leipzig: Teubner, 1938.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Echo." *New Literary History* 24 (1993): 17-43.
- Theocritus. *A Translation and Commentary*. Edited by S. F. Gow. 2 vols. 2nd. ed. 1950. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.
- Vinge, Louise M. *The Narcissus Theme in Western European Literature up to the Early 19th Century*. Translated by Robert Dewsnap. Lund: Gleerups, 1967.
- Wieck, Wilfried. *Söhne wollen Väter: Wider die weibliche Umklammerung*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1992.
- Wieseler, Friedrich. *Narkissos. Eine kunstmythologische Abhandlung nebst einem Anhang über die Narcissen und ihre Beziehung im Leben, Mythos und Cultus der Griechen*. Göttingen: Dieterich, 1856.
- Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich von. "Erkenne Dich selbst" [1923]. In *Reden und Vorträge*. 2 vols. 4th ed. 1926. Reprint, Dublin: Weidmann, 1967.
- Wolf, Ernest S. "Transferences and Countertransferences in the Analysis of Disorders of the Self." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 15 (1979): 577-594.
- Zimmerman, Clayton. *The Pastoral Narcissus: A Study of the First Idyll of Theocritus*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1994.



Zweig, Paul. *The Heresy of Self-Love: A Study of Subversive Individualism*. 1968. Reprint, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

## VITA

Joachim Vogeler studied Classics, English, German, Comparative Literature, Education, and Psychology in Baton Rouge, Berlin, and Bonn.

His scholarly pursuits have included presenting several papers on Euripides, Plautus, Ovid, Shakespeare, O'Neill, Robinson Jeffers, and literary theory at scholarly conferences, and chairing a panel on "Fantasy in the Classics" at the 17th International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts. He has had experience teaching Classics, English, and German. Mr. Vogeler's chief academic interest is the myth of Narcissus, and he has published reviews on narcissism in literature and on the Medea figure.

Additionally, Mr. Vogeler has been organizing and directing English as a Second Language courses in England and in the United States over the past four summers. He moderates informal, weekly round-table discussions on international topics at the International Cultural Center at Louisiana State University. Furthermore, he produces and hosts "The International Show," a weekly radio program featuring world music at the Louisiana State University radio station, 91.1 FM KLSU-Baton Rouge.

DOCTORAL EXAMINATION AND DISSERTATION REPORT

**Candidate:** Joachim C. H. Vogeler

**Major Field:** Comparative Literature

**Title of Dissertation:** The Myth of Narcissus and the Narcissistic Structure

**Approved:**

Robert J. Edgenorth  
Major Professor and Chairman

John W. Lorber  
Dean of the Graduate School

**EXAMINING COMMITTEE:**

Ernst Bortolucci

Alexander Leupin

Herbert R. R.

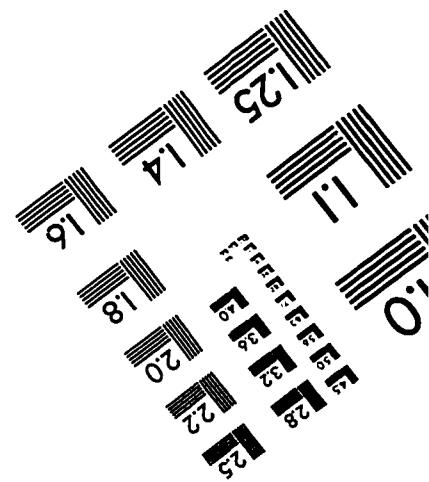
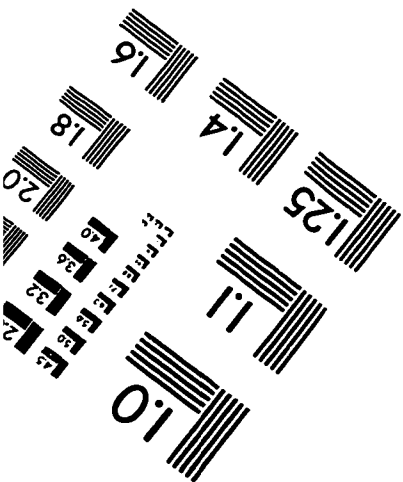
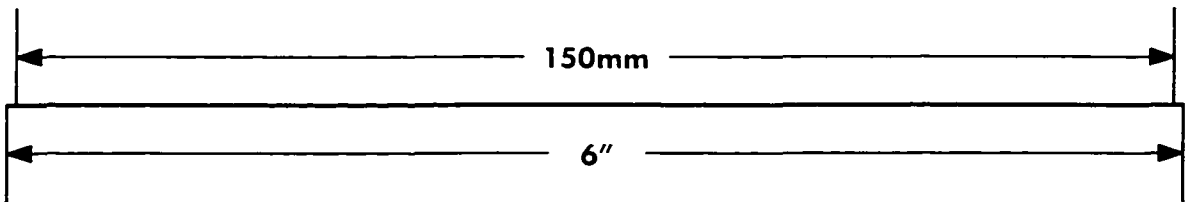
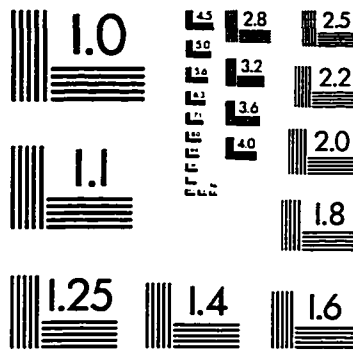
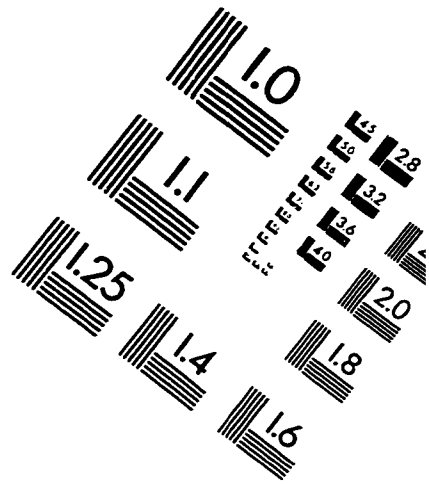
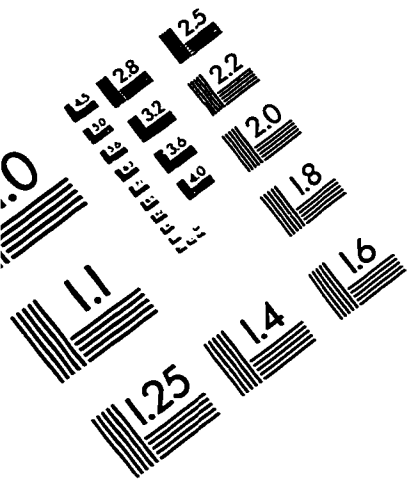
John R. R.

Carl L. R.

**Date of Examination:**

October 16, 1997

# IMAGE EVALUATION TEST TARGET (QA-3)



APPLIED IMAGE, Inc  
1653 East Main Street  
Rochester, NY 14609 USA  
Phone: 716/482-0300  
Fax: 716/288-5989

© 1993, Applied Image, Inc., All Rights Reserved